

A Mind for Study

Means of Grace: Part 3 “A Mind for Study”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 27th, 2020

17th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Proverbs 2:1-15; James 1:2-5; Luke 2:41-52

Reflection: Psalm 111

Greeting: May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together, that we be united by one Spirit, serving the Father, in the truth of the Son. Let us celebrate the love of Christ that brings us together in God’s care. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: God, we seek you on this day. Guide us as we gather together this day, as you do in all things. As we lift up our prayers to you this day, we ask that our faith be lifted, and our resolve be strengthened. Let us be drawn together that we may worship in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 111

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of honor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds; the Lord is gracious and merciful. He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant. He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

(Psalm 111 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 111 and we hear God’s honor and righteousness. That God’s great works should be studied. That the “fear of the Lord”, God’s awe-inspiring presence, is the beginning of wisdom. How do you contemplate all that God is to you? How do you study the works of the Lord? How do you honor God? How do you experience his holiness?

Prayer: God, full of majesty and honor. Give us a right mind that looks to you as the example of all that we should be. Grant us the wisdom we need to seek your ways and a greater understanding of your love for us. Show us the way that we may find the words that help us and others to heal and find hope. Help us that we may grow in your grace and mercy, and that we may find peace in your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Proverbs chapter 2, verses 1 through 15.

My son, accept my words and store up my commands. Turn your ear toward wisdom, and stretch your mind toward understanding. Call out for insight, and cry aloud for understanding. Seek it like silver; search for it like hidden treasure. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God. The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He reserves ability for those with integrity. He is a shield for those who live a blameless life. He protects the paths of justice and guards the way of those who are loyal to him. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, as well as integrity, every good course. Wisdom will enter your mind, and knowledge will fill you with delight. Discretion will guard you; understanding will protect you. Wisdom will rescue you from the evil path, from people who twist their words. They forsake the way of integrity and go on obscure paths. They enjoy doing evil, rejoicing in their twisted evil. Their paths are confused; they get lost on their way.
(Proverbs 2:1-15 CEB+)

Our next reading is from James chapter 1, verses 2 through 5.

My brothers and sisters, think of the various tests you encounter as occasions for joy. After all, you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let this endurance complete its work so that you may be fully mature, complete, and lacking in nothing. But anyone who needs wisdom should ask God, whose very nature is to give to everyone without a second thought, without keeping score. Wisdom will certainly be given to those who ask.
(James 1:2-5 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Luke, chapter 2, verses 41 through 52.

Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it. Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends. When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" But they didn't understand what he said to them.

Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people. (Luke 2:41-52 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So this week as we continue on in our series about means of grace, we come to study. And we come to study after talking about prayer and fasting. And part of that is because fasting is one of the ways that we can give ourselves a time to study, which is important to have. And prayer helps us to get in the right mindset. It's important that we begin anytime of study with prayer, so that we are not just staring at words on a page or not just thinking, but that we are asking that Scripture be opened to us and revealed to us, and that something more is shown to us. I think that's an important thing to remember. When we study, we aren't just there for memorization. In fact, sometimes I will change up which version I'm reading so that I am presented with the words in a different way to see what other meanings might be there to make sure I'm not getting hung up on memorizing phrases. Now, of course, there are times that you'll want to memorize, especially if you are studying for strengthening yourself. It helps to be able to have those scripture passages that you memorize that become part of you. However, it's also important that we study so that we may grow. And we see the importance of study in some of our readings from today.

In our Gospel reading for today, that when Jesus goes his family, up to Jerusalem for the Passover festival and he's 12, that they head back, and they lose him. And I'm sure any parent is reading that and going, "Yep. Yep, that happens." And so when they go to find him, they return they find him in the temple. "And everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers." It ends with the statement that "Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people." And so, instead of focusing in on why Jesus was there or any of those aspects that we could look at, I wanted to come at this from the fact that Jesus was there and he was giving answers to questions. But he was also listening, sitting among the teachers. And there's this great idea of discourse going on. And that he was very knowledgeable, but he was also surrounded by people who are very knowledgeable, who had dedicated much time to study. And I liked that it ends with this idea he matures in wisdom and in years, because that's really something we all strive for. And that idea of wisdom is something that is echoed throughout Scripture, but a great example of that is from Proverbs.

Proverbs talks about wisdom and understanding as some of the best things that we can strive for. And one of the ways that we can gain that is through study. In many ways, having wisdom and understanding is greater than any sort of wealth you could have because it opens up the door to much, much more than wealth can. And part of that, as we see in Proverbs, is discovering knowledge of God, and being able to understand God the best we can. And that's a

big part of what study is. And the other part is that, becoming knowledgeable and becoming wise also helps us to, as Proverbs says, understand righteousness and justice as well as integrity. It helps us to be honest because it keeps us on an honest path. Wisdom helps us to recognize trouble.

Our third reading today, from James, talks about being tested. And that faith produces endurance, and that one of the things that we need for that is wisdom, and whoever seeks God, God will give wisdom to. And that wisdom is something that's very important in the way that we handle our lives. Because too often we get caught up in this idea that God will provide. God will provide. God will provide. It's not for me to know. And you know, there's times when we say that because we can't know. But there's also a tendency to want to say it when we could know.

Now, one of the things that people might get hung up on when we begin talking about study is what that means. And it can mean multiple things. First and foremost, it would be studying the Scriptures. And that's because in them lies all the knowledge necessary for salvation. It's everything that you need to be able to be the best you can be. Now the problem is that it's not always straightforward. We like to think of the Bible as sort of a manual for life. And though there are rules lined up and things set out, much of the Bible is a story to help us gain wisdom, because it's a story about people struggling to find a way to do the right thing. And the Bible is filled with flawed people making mistakes. It's full of people having disagreements and arguments. Even on some of the things that we would think are most important. And we see it throughout. There are disputes in Israel all the time. Disputes between different tribes, disputes between people, sometimes disputes between the people and the leadership. Sometimes between rival leaders. And understanding those disputes and those problems and how they solved them gives us a greater understanding of how we should solve our own. Or, as the case may be, things we should avoid.

One of the things that we also have to do is to be able to study with others, because it helps us to bounce ideas off or to say, "you know, this part kind of tripped me up. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be learning here." And so when we have a mind for study it's that we clear our head and we get into that space, where we say I'm wanting to know more. And I want it to be opened up to me and I want to know what the message is. And this is important especially when we are reading the Gospels. The gospels are full of parables, and occasionally, the disciples ask what the parables mean because they're unsure. And if they're unsure, you can feel a little better about saying you know what this is a little confusing, I'm not sure what's going on here. It's a nice reminder that sometimes things are not always so easy.

There are also the issues that there's also multiple layers of understanding. One would be understanding the text as it was originally written in its original form by itself. That if you read one of the prophets, they wrote with a purpose for a people around them. And so we start with that original context. But then we have the fact that there's interlinking stories, and that there's interlinking themes that run through the whole Bible. Ideas of forgiveness, of God's mercy and grace, of love, of charity, what it means to be human, and what it means to follow God. When we do as Proverbs says, and we try to gain wisdom, and we try to get understanding, we do it so that we will know God better. It's also going to mean that we do our

best to understand the world around us. And one of the ways that we can do that is again through study. Both study of Scripture, but also in study of ideas that people have gained through Scripture. There are plenty of people that have written about and tried to interpret Scripture, and it's good to understand those. Now sometimes you might think, well, I need to be pointed to exactly what I should be reading and what I shouldn't because I don't want to go down the wrong path. However, that's a little bit of discernment that also comes from study. One of the other interesting things about studying is that it doesn't mean that you just study. The people who have right thinking. When we look at a lot of the early church, there are a lot of writings that are a response to someone else's writing. A defense of their stance. And you can learn a lot about these by understanding the other side of the argument. Which means that sometimes we have to read ideas that we disagree with. And this can happen a lot with Scripture, and that's because there's so much that's open to interpretation. Those of you that studied Revelation with me will know that there can be a lot of different opinions about what Scripture means.

Now, you might say “well if there's so much disagreement, how can we ever hope to gain any sort of understanding? How can a mind for study open up the doors to anything?” Well, here's the thing. When we are opening ourselves up to that and working on that, when we let ourselves be open to new ideas and open to the Spirit to guide us and to lead us, open to Christ opening our eyes and our ears, opening our minds. Just like he did for those that walked with him on the road to Emmaus. God can open us up to things that we didn't see before. And it's important because if we can keep an open mind and trying to learn more about God we don't become closed off and start rejecting things, simply because they don't fit in with our current picture. Of course, there will be ideas that we reject because they don't fit in with God. That happens a lot. There is an entire church history of rejecting teachings that don't fit with what we are told about God. But if you don't understand them, you may not understand if you end up with an idea that runs contrary to Scripture.

Now, one might be worried that you'll run into controversies, and you will. One might worry that you'll run into concepts that are too hard to grasp, and you will. We are always going to run in to people who have different ideas. Wherever you are you probably know somebody close to you that has a different idea than you about certain parts of Scripture and certain ways that God acts. Wisdom lets us understand them. Seeking knowledge helps us to be able to take those in and process them and decide whether or not those ideas fit. When you look at it from a Wesleyan method, we can use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to look at Scripture, as our main source. And we use our reason, our experience, and our tradition in order to better evaluate and understand it. Because tradition often builds us up with an understanding of how people have understood it before us, how it has been passed down to us and why. Reason can help us see if something seems to be contradictory, how it can fit in. If we get two contradictory messages in Scripture, how do we rectify them? And we study. And we learn. And we grow, both in our understanding and as people. And we also grow closer to God because we gain a deeper understanding of how his creation works. And when we apply experience to all of that, it helps us to understand our relationship to it all. We often under count our experience. Because we think that everything we're supposed to know will be written down and handed to

us. And some things we understand better because of the way we have lived it. And we bring that to study and we especially bring it when we share those ideas with others. And we study together.

These are all important things. And the reason that study becomes such an important part of our Christian life, is that it helps us to better understand everything. that if we're to understand how Christ came into the world to free us from sin and death, we have to understand what all of that means. if we are going to tell others about life everlasting, we have to have an idea of what that means. If we are going to understand anything about what it means to say that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again, we need to be able to explain those things so that they relate. for our own sake and for others. Because we can be the gateway for others to enter into study themselves. We can be the door that opens that leads people onto a path that takes them to a closer relationship with God. That will help people to turn away from the things causing problems in their lives. Study helps us to turn away from the things that we don't want to be doing because we better understand our own relationship with Christ. We aided in all those things through study. And we do that through fasting. We do that through prayer. And we do all of those things wrapped in together. That we pray that God will guide us and lead us. We set aside the time to be able to understand it. And we humbly and earnestly seek that knowledge so that we may gain wisdom. That we pray that we will have a mind for study, so that we may understand it better, understand ourselves better, and understand God better.

There's a lot more that can be set for study. And we may come back and have a whole series just about how we study. And look at those different aspects of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. But for today, I just want you to take away the idea that study is an important part of Christian life, because it does help us to grow closer to God. Because the more that we understand about God's will, the more that we can do it. The more we understand about God's love, the better we can share it. The more we understand about Christ's sacrifice, the more that we can help others experience it. We gain wisdom to share wisdom, and we gain it through having a mind for study. So I encourage each of you. If you're already taking the time to study, maybe take time study a little bit more. If you don't regularly study find a time. Even if it's just listening to Scripture and pondering it. That's something. Something that helps you grow. Something that helps to build up your relationship with God. So take the knowledge that has been provided for you. Take it and use it well, so that you may study as a means of grace to build a closer relationship with God the Father, with Christ the Son, revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: We go forth now that we may be ministers of the good news wherever we go. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Bill Calvert	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers
Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Pat Nebel	Don Stewart
Earlene Shupe	Brenda Hurt	Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Ken Bushur
Tommy Jester	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds	Bill Gilbert	Family of Bill Huddleston
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Family of Novella Claiborn	Leo Smith	Dan Eubank	Family of Charlotte Carrell
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Family of Lyle Whitley		

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

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Our Current Series – Means of Grace

This series looks at the things that we do to connect to God so that we grow in discipleship.

September 13th – *A Heart of Prayer* – Prayer connects us to God.

September 20th – *Fast with a Purpose* – How should we fast?

September 27th – *A Mind for Study* – Study helps our spiritual growth.

October 4th – *A Thirst for Justice* – Seeking justice is part of the mission.

October 11th – *The Poor and Hungry* – Caring for others is care for God.

October 18th – *Worship Together* – We come together to grow together.

9/20/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We are continuing in both online and in person worship at this time. I am thankful for all of the work that everyone has done to make this possible. As we return to in person worship, please contact me for details or see prior weekly updates for all of the current safety precautions.

I apologize that my time has seemed to be disappearing as of late, as I am dealing with school in home, which tends to take up a lot more time than I'm used to in the day. Please contact me with anything you think I may need to know, as I am relying upon all of you to stay up to date with everything going on right now.

Charge conference is set to be a virtual meeting on October 8th at 7pm. I would like as much of the church council to meet as possible. I will have more details soon about that.

If you know someone who would like to receive printed information every week, please let me know. If you come to this online, feel free to share it.

The church is still active and working, and as such, still needs your financial support. Please contact me or the church treasurer for options. Thank you for your continued support.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

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