

Free to Care

Faith & Wisdom: Part 1 “Free to Care”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – July 2, 2023

5th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Proverbs 3:21-35; Philippians 2:1-11; Luke 6:27-36

Reflection: Psalm 146

Greeting: Call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding. Seek it like silver, like finding a hidden treasure. Then you will discover the knowledge of God. The Lord gives wisdom and protects the paths of justice.

Prayer: We call upon you Lord, knowing that you are more ready to bestow your blessings upon us than we are to seek them, and give out of your love and righteousness that which we have not earned. We turn to you, knowing that all wisdom begins with you. May you guide us to your knowledge and strengthen us in your truth. May we receive your mercy, eager that we may share your mercy and love with the world. By your Spirit, guide us and lead us this day that we may share in your word and walk in your ways, and may we be enlightened in word and deed through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 146

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!
(Psalm 146 NRSV*)

We read the words of Psalm 146 and we hear of God’s justice. That it is God who gives us freedom and God who lifts us up in love. That we are called to share God’s message of deliverance with the world that all may be set free. That we share God’s love with all people so that all may know freedom in Christ. How do you share the message of salvation with others? What do you do to spread justice to those who are oppressed? How can we share the wisdom and knowledge of faith that God has shared with you?

Prayer: Lord, it is your everlasting light that we seek in the darkness. May you bolster our faith so that we may seek your wisdom and truth. May your love strengthen us as we join together before you in prayer on this day. We thank you for your care, inviting us to seek your knowledge and to know your word. Together we bring our spoken and unspoken joys and concerns to lay before you, knowing that you are attentive to our every need. May you lift us up that we may know your blessings in our laughter and our tears. May your steadfast love guide us through our joys and our sorrows. And by your Spirit may you guide us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 for today comes from Proverbs chapter 3 verse 21 through 35.

My son, don't let them slip from your eyes; hold on to sound judgment and discretion. They will be life for your whole being, and an ornament for your neck. Then you will walk safely on your path, and your foot won't stumble. If you lie down, you won't be terrified. When you lie down, your sleep will be pleasant. Don't fear sudden terror or the ruin that comes to the wicked. The Lord will be your confidence; he will guard your feet from being snared. Don't withhold good from someone who deserves it, when it is in your power to do so. Don't say to your neighbor, "Go and come back; I'll give it to you tomorrow," when you have it. Don't plan to harm your neighbor who trusts and lives near you. Don't accuse anyone without reason, when they haven't harmed you. Don't envy violent people or choose any of their ways. Devious people are detestable to the Lord, but the virtuous are his close friends. The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks mockers, but he shows favor to the humble. The wise gain respect, but fools receive shame. (Proverbs 3:21-35 CEB+)

Our next reading comes from Philippians chapter 2 verse 1 through 11.

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When he found himself in the form of a human, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God highly honored him and gave him a name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:1-11 CEB+)

Our last reading comes from Luke chapter 6 verse 27 through 36.

“But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don’t withhold your shirt either. Give to everyone who asks and don’t demand your things back from those who take them. Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you. “If you love those who love you, why should you be commended? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you be commended? Even sinners do that. If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, why should you be commended? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be paid back in full. Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. If you do, you will have a great reward. You will be acting the way children of the Most High act, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. (Luke 6:27-36 CEB+)”

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

Today marks the beginning of a series that's going to last all of July. And we are going to be looking at faith and wisdom. Every week, this series will take a verse from Proverbs. This came about after looking at Proverbs in our Wednesday evening Bible Study. After our discussions, I wanted to find a way to tie together wisdom and faith from a text that can sometimes be hard to draw on because of how much is just one-line statements. It brought me to this current series, in which we will look at how intricately wisdom and faith are bound together. We have to have wisdom to understand faith. Because if we don't apply wisdom there's a good chance that we will have misunderstandings, miscalculations, and missteps. God gives us wisdom so that we can discern the truth, but only if we are willing to search for it. And that wisdom is also used in how we apply our faith. And I thought this weekend was a great one to explore this idea that we are free to care.

Now, you might be wondering what it means to be free to care. That by faith we are set free from all of the expectations that the world sets for us. We are free to care about the people that society has left behind. We are free to care for people the world says we don't need to care about because of bigotry and suspicion. Because we have been made free in Christ, no longer slaves to sin and death, free to follow God. But that freedom comes with responsibility. That we are called to the greatest of the commandments, which we will also hear throughout this series. That if we are to love as Christ has loved us, we must care for others. We must put our faith into action. And we find how to use the freedom in Christ from Proverbs. We are encouraged to hold on to sound judgment and discretion. That sound judgment and discretion will carry us through. That our confidence comes from the Lord. But then we're told some things that we have to make sure we're doing because they're how we demonstrate sound judgment and discretion. It's what we do when we have confidence in the Lord and it's what we do because we are free. We don't withhold good from someone who deserves it. We don't hold back till tomorrow what we can give today. We don't plan harm for our neighbor. We don't make false accusations because we cherish the truth. We don't wish to be like people who are

focused on destruction and hate. Because the wise gain respect but fools receive shame. We are shown that seeking God's wisdom will lead us to care for others.

That we should humbly serve God by caring for others. The kind of humility we see in Christ. Philippians reminds us of Christ's humility. That Christ emptied himself in taking on our humanity and humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. Christ demonstrates humility in servant leadership as well. That we shouldn't cling to selfish ideas. That we shouldn't think of others as better than ourselves. That we should embrace humility, adopting the attitude that was in Christ and accepting his love. Because Christ has united us in love and set us free to love. Christ has set us free so that we can care. That we are not held back by our ego. That we are not held back by arrogance. We serve a Savior who humbled himself to the point of death to demonstrate for us what love truly is. It is a sacrificial love that allows us to freely love others just as Christ has loved us.

Who should we love? For that we can turn to the Gospel of Luke and hear a litany of things we should do. We should love our enemies, do good for people who hate you, bless people who curse you, pray for people who malign you and mistreat you, give more than is asked from you, and treat people how you want to be treated. Now this is where some of that wisdom comes in. Sometimes we confuse ourselves about how we are to do this. We think that loving someone means agreeing with them. Which is foolishness. I can guarantee that I do not completely agree with any of you. And I don't have to agree with you to love you. I wouldn't expect people to agree with their enemies, but we are still called to love them. Because we are called to know better. That we do not meet hate with hate, but we meet hate with love. If what we do is not driven by love, we need to apply wisdom to discern a better path forward. Because we have to make sure that we don't become the ones hurting people but should always be finding ways to care for others because of our freedom in Christ. Is it going to be hard? Of course it is. It is easy to run away. It is easy to make excuses. But loving others is worth it. Jesus even forces us to reflect on how easy it is to fool ourselves into thinking we are doing enough. If you only love people who love you, that isn't following Christ. If you only do good to people who have already done good to you, that shows nothing of your faith. You're just responding to others, and never taking the initiative we find in the Holy Spirit. If you only lend to people when you know you'll get paid back, that isn't faith but business. You're just doing what anyone would do. There is nothing Christlike in those actions. But if you love your enemies, if you do good for the sake of doing good, if you lend without expecting anything in return, and if you give freely, you will be reflecting the gift of love freely given to you in Christ. That is an expression of your faith. That is a sign of the knowledge you have gained in the Lord. It is a sign of how much you value Christ as an intricate part of your life. That your relationship with God guides how you treat others. And if you can be compassionate as your Father is compassionate, others will see the steadfast love and faithfulness we find in Christ.

But it takes wisdom to know how to best use our gifts. We must discern the best path forward. It takes wisdom to understand that we are free to care. Are people obsessed with

making money? We are free to ignore profit motives. Are people worried about stature and honor? We are free to humble ourselves in our service to others. Are people worried about being seen with the wrong kind of people? We are free to care about all people. Are people only worried about themselves? We are free to abandon selfishness and greed and to welcome justice. We are free to stand up for the rights of all people. Not just the people who look like us or think like us. Not even just the people who worship like us. Because we are only as free as the least, the last, and the overlooked. How can we welcome others to freely follow Christ if they are not free to worship how they chose? How can we invite others to freely welcome the Holy Spirit if they are not free to choose? How can we bring people into our Father's fold if they are not free to worship without fear of persecution? We stand up for the least and the last because their freedom is our freedom. Because we don't have to agree with people to love them. We don't have to believe the same thing to want others to know peace. Christ has made us free to care for all people and stand up for all people. So that all may know love, and all may know peace. What they do with that freedom is on them but what you do with that freedom to care is on you. So, use the wisdom and the knowledge that God has blessed you with and let your faith guide you to help all those who are in need. So that we may all be free to care. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. 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 below. 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: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – The Spirit Moves

Our current series looks at how we exercise our faith with wisdom. Each week we will look at Proverbs and explore an aspect of our faith.

July 2nd – Free to Care – Proverbs 3:21-35; Philippians 2:1-11; Luke 6:27-36

July 9th – To Believe – Proverbs 9:7-12; James 2:8-17; Matthew 9:18-31

July 16th – Being in Prayer – Proverbs 15:26-33; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 18:1-8

July 23rd – God & Neighbor – Proverbs 12:17-26; Galatians 5:13-18, 22-26; Luke 10:25-37

July 30th – Pursuit of Wisdom – Proverbs 4:1-9; James 3:13-18; Mark 12:28-34

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Connie Brown
Marsha Overton	Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox
Taylor Waldorf	Harriet Tucker	Becky McGuinness	Janet Yokum
Donna Farley	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins	Kara Newton

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

* Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.