

## **To Believe**

Faith & Wisdom: Part 2 “To Believe”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – July 9, 2023

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:** Proverbs 9:7-12; James 2:8-17; Matthew 9:18-31

**Reflection:** Psalm 111

**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 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 of God’s great works. That God has shown us his grace and mercy. That we can trust in the Lord. That we find wisdom in understanding our God. How do you experience God’s faithfulness and truth? How is it reflected in how you live your faith? How do you help others to experience the love of Christ in their lives? In what ways do you show your love of God and love for your neighbor? 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 9, verse 7 through 12.

*Whoever instructs the cynic gets insulted; whoever corrects the wicked gets hurt. Don't correct the impudent, or they will hate you; correct the wise, and they will love you. Teach the wise, and they will become wiser; inform the righteous, and their learning will increase. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord; the knowledge of the holy one is understanding. Through me your days will be many; years will be added to your life. If you are wise, it is to your benefit; if you are cynical, you will bear it all alone. (Proverbs 9:7-12 CEB+)*

Our next reading comes from James chapter 2, verse 8 through 17.

*You do well when you really fulfill the royal law found in scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself. But when you show favoritism, you are committing a sin, and by that same law you are exposed as a lawbreaker. Anyone who tries to keep all of the Law but fails at one point is guilty of failing to keep all of it. The one who said, Don't commit adultery, also said, Don't commit murder. So if you don't commit adultery but do commit murder, you are a lawbreaker. In every way, then, speak and act as people who will be judged by the law of freedom. There will be no mercy in judgment for anyone who hasn't shown mercy. Mercy overrules judgment. My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity. (James 2:8-17 CEB+)*

Our last reading comes from Matthew chapter 9, verse 18 through 31.

*While Jesus was speaking to them, a ruler came and knelt in front of him, saying, "My daughter has just died. But come and place your hand on her, and she'll live." So Jesus and his disciples got up and went with him. Then a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the hem of his clothes. She thought, If I only touch his robe I'll be healed. When Jesus turned and saw her, he said, "Be encouraged, daughter. Your faith has healed you." And the woman*

*was healed from that time on. When Jesus went into the ruler's house, he saw the flute players and the distressed crowd. He said, "Go away, because the little girl isn't dead but is asleep"; but they laughed at him. After he had sent the crowd away, Jesus went in and touched her hand, and the little girl rose up. News about this spread throughout that whole region. As Jesus departed, two blind men followed him, crying out, "Show us mercy, Son of David." When he came into the house, the blind men approached him. Jesus said to them, "Do you believe I can do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, "It will happen for you just as you have believed." Their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly warned them, "Make sure nobody knows about this." But they went out and spread the word about him throughout that whole region. (Matthew 9:18-31 CEB+)*

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

Today We continue with our faith and wisdom series. This week we look at what it means to believe and why that is important. We start once again with our reading from Proverbs. Here we are reminded that the pursuit of wisdom is important and that it starts with God. However, we must also use wisdom in understanding what is being said in Proverbs. We read that "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord." Now, I think too often we take that idea of fear and get a little confused by it. I don't think a normal fear is what is being discussed here in Proverbs. One way we can understand this is by understanding the mirror statement we get. We see this kind of thing throughout the Bible, especially in the Psalms and Proverbs. We get a statement that is repeated immediately after, as if the passages echo each other. The other half of our statement about fear reads "the knowledge of the holy one is understanding." We might think of that fear as reverence. We might consider it being awestruck because of God's greatness. Because I don't want to treat God as someone that I feel I should always be afraid of. Not if I think of God as my Heavenly Father watching over me, guiding me, comforting me. But I am in awe of him. I have a tremendous reverence for God. And I do think that seeking God helps us to grow in wisdom. As Proverbs says, teach the wise and they will grow in wisdom. But we have to make the choice to seek wisdom so that we can understand God and understand our faith. We are called to God's knowledge so that we can discern God's purpose for us and then live it by acting on our faith. Because faith should be a big part of our lives. But we can run into issues if we don't use wisdom in understanding that faith. Turning away from wisdom will end up leaving us empty. Because it means that we stop trying to really understand God and we stop putting our faith into action.

But if we don't put our faith into action, what is our faith? We see faith and wisdom meet in this idea of knowing how to live out what we believe. Because if we don't apply wisdom into how we live our faith, we can end up having beliefs that we really don't believe. Now, you might be wondering how does one have a belief they don't actually believe? For that we turn to James. We hear from James that, "You do well when you really fulfill the royal law found in scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself." As we know very well, the two greatest commandments are to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. James reminds us that we must love our neighbor but also guides us on what can keep us from loving our neighbor.

James shares some wisdom about how it is that we live out our faith. That if we are to love our neighbor, we cannot show favoritism. James points out that if you do attempt to keep all the law, that failing at one point means you are failing to keep all of it. And it becomes clear that trying to catch others in the law will simply lead to us being ensnared by the law. That we put ourselves into judgement when we decide that we should be passing judgements upon others. But in the same way, we are swept up in mercy when we show mercy. Because Mercy overrules judgement. In seeking God's mercy, we free ourselves from the need to judge others, and we recognize that Christ has freed us from slavery to sin and death. But if we decide to judge others, then we have freely declared that we do not wish to have the burden removed from our shoulders. Because the only person that is judged when we pass judgement on others is ourselves. The moment that we invoke the law to condemn others, we really invoke the law to condemn ourselves. Now, do me a favor; if you have never sinned, please raise your hand. Anyone? And there is the problem. We highlight our own sin when we attempt to condemn others under the law.

But it's not the only way that we ensnare ourselves. We also ensnare ourselves by having beliefs we don't actually believe. To understand what I am saying, we can look at James again. That if we believe that we should love God and love our neighbor, then we must show our love of God in the way that we actually do what our neighbor needs. It does nothing to believe that someone should be fed and not to act on it. It does nothing to believe that someone should be clothed and never to act on it. It means nothing if we think our neighbor should be loved and we do nothing to act on it. It means we don't actually believe those things. We just think it's a nice idea. But in that same token, if we just think it's a nice idea, then do we actually believe in Christ? Or do we just think that Christ is a nice idea? And I know that statement might be a little jarring. It is a difficult thing to contemplate. But wisdom demands that we take the time to understand our faith and what we believe. What is your faith if it is not how you live? It is all well and good to declare what it is you claim to believe. It is another to demonstrate that you actually believe it. Will we be foolish and simply proclaim what we believe and never actually show our faith? Or we use the wisdom that begins in the knowledge that God has given us to act on our faith?

And how important is it to believe? Jesus shows that it's terribly important not just to have faith, but to act on it. Christ demonstrates that believing something and then acting on it are important aspects of true faith. In our reading from Matthew, we see a number of people acting on what they believe. A ruler comes to Jesus and tells him that his daughter has died. But he isn't simply delivering a message. He is acting on faith, because he tells Jesus that if he were to place his hand on her that she would live. He believes Jesus can do it, so he acts on that faith. Because of this, Jesus got up to go with him. On the way there, we see more faith in action. A woman who has been bleeding for twelve years touches Christ's robe. Why? Because she believes that if she simply touches his robe that she will be healed. Jesus then turns to her and tells her that "Your faith has healed you." And she was healed. She believed so she put

her faith in action and Christ tells her it was that faith that healed her. Finally, they get to the house, and just like the ruler believed, Jesus touches his daughter, and she lives. But wait, there's more! Jesus was leaving when two blind men cry out to him. Jesus wants to know if they believe that he can heal them. They say they do believe it, that is why they called out. So, Jesus tells them they are healed just as they have believed. There's a thread running through all of that and it's Jesus responding to faith in action. Jesus demonstrating that they had faith and they acted on it.

I think too often our faith becomes this thought experiment where we try to list the things we believe without understanding how we put that faith into action. We get statements of faith without any idea of how to live those statements. We think saying it or writing it down is enough. Too often we think that what we believe is more important than how we believe. Because the how is when we put it into action, when faith goes from being just a statement into a way of life. It is when it becomes more than a mental exercise about words on a page and it becomes a life lived in Christ. Because there's a big difference between saying "I believe Jesus Christ is my Savior" and demonstrating that belief in how we live. And how do we show it? We show it by loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. That we use the wisdom God has given us to discern how we can best help one another, how we can love one another, how we can show mercy to each other. We live it in how we lift each other up in love to echo the love that Christ has shown to us. Because I have never known anyone to take up a life in Christ because of condemnation. I have never known someone to discover Christ because they had been shown contempt and ridicule. It is easy to simply have words about Christ, it is another thing to actually live those words through Christ. We should understand what it means to believe. Because a life in Christ is a life that reflects his great love. We live in Christ by being merciful as he is merciful. We demonstrate faith in Christ when we forgive as we have been forgiving. Because a life in Christ isn't about condemnation, but about salvation. Our Savior is not one who was quick to beat people with words but was one who would forgive the very people nailing him to a cross. If Christ can forgive them, who is it we can condemn? Nobody but ourselves.

So let us live by the example set for us in Christ Jesus. That we don't let our faith become an idle thing that guides only our words, but a way that we live. That it is our faith that will move our feet. It is our faith in God the Father that will move us to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is our faith in Christ the Son that strengthens us by faith to let us forgive. It is our faith in the Holy Spirit that helps us to be wise enough to not draw condemnation upon our own heads. Because every time we pick up the law like a stone to cast condemnation upon others, the only person that stone will hit is ourselves. Let us forever remember that mercy overrules judgment. Let us remember that we put our faith into action when we show mercy and grace, and we forgive. Let us be wise enough that we can act on what we believe so that what we believe is how we live. And let us know that to believe is to live by faith, and how we live is in Christ, forever and always. 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

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