

Older and Wiser

Theology Thoughts: Part 6 “Older and Wiser”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 29, 2023

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Ecclesiastes 11:1-8; Proverbs 3:13-20

Reflection: Psalm 122

Greeting: Make your ways known to me, Lord; Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth. Because you are the God who saves me. I put my hope in you all day long! Praise the Lord!

Prayer: God, help us to always seek wisdom in all that we do. May we grow in your knowledge and understanding this day. Help us to gain insight when we bring ourselves before you in prayer. May you help us to slow down so that we may love our neighbor and may show our love for you. Grant us wisdom that we may learn the lesson you have for us today. Let us walk in your truth that we may share that truth with the world. We thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. By your Spirit help us to help one another. We pray that you will continue to help us grow in mercy and grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers.” For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. (Psalm 122 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 122, and we hear of celebrating God. That we join together in worship and praise to lift up prayers together. We gather in the presence of the Lord to find peace and hope. What is a way you’ve lifted up thanks to God this week? Who have you offered the peace of Christ? In the coming week, who can you reach out to so that you can celebrate Christ with them? Are there ways that you can reach out to share the joy that you find in God? Who can you lift up in your prayers? How will you celebrate in your prayers? How can we share God’s love with a broken world? How may we join together to share the comfort and care of Christ?

Prayer: Lord, we turn to you because of your steadfast love. We know that even when we struggle you are with us. May your Holy Spirit guide us in truth and light. Help us to share the peace and love of Christ each and every day. As we come before you this day, we bring to you the joys and concerns of our lives that we have shared aloud together. We also turn to you in prayer with the unspoken worries and celebrations of our hearts. Help us that we walk in your ways and seek the path of righteousness. May you be with us to strengthen us in our gladness and our sorrow. We pray that you will help us to grow in love through our laughter and our tears. As we learn more about you, Lord, may we grow closer to you. May your steadfast love and faithfulness guide us all the days of our lives, 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 comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Ecclesiastes chapter 11, verses 1 through 8.

Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back. Divide your means seven ways, or even eight, for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth. When clouds are full, they empty rain on the earth; whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. Whoever observes the wind will not sow, and whoever regards the clouds will not reap. Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all, yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. (Ecclesiastes 11:1-8 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Proverbs chapter 3, verses 13 through 20.

Happy are those who find wisdom and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew. (Proverbs 3:13-20 NRSV)*

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

As I have a bit of a special message for my birthday, which happens to be today. I wanted to make sure there was time for the little bit of Bible theater my from my kids. I actually thought about two different verses when I was thinking about getting older. The first one is from 1 Samuel, that the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people. The next is like it from the Gospel of Luke, that Jesus increased in wisdom and in

years and in divine and human favor. I often think about those when I'm getting older because both signal continued growth. That we continue to learn, and we continue to grow as we get older. I thought that it would be nice to share some of my own wisdom today as I reflected on some excellent wisdom from the Bible. I often think about the wisdom that I have hopefully gained as I've grown older and learned from my mistakes. Too often we look back with regret over our mistakes instead of understanding them as lessons learned and knowledge gained. Because we can't change them, we can only learn from them. I think this is why I take comfort in Ecclesiastes. It is a difficult text at times, but it is because it causes us to think about life in a way that is different than much of the Bible. Because it doesn't just teach what to do but challenges how we think. I find it relatable because of my own pursuit of wisdom as I reflect on growing older. Qoheleth, our teacher in Ecclesiastes, talks about preparing for more than one outcome. That we don't put all our eggs in one basket because we don't know the future. But something that I have always seen is that we should learn to enjoy life. Enjoy it when you're young because you won't be young forever. Enjoy it in your old age because you've been given all these years to rejoice in.

As I've gotten older, I've taken this more and more to heart. That it's good to enjoy where you're at with what you have. And with that, I learned to stop chasing the idea of more. When I was a younger man, I chased this idea that I needed to keep working harder and harder and climbing the ladder because I needed to make more money and to be the one in charge. Those were my goals and I reached them. I had gone from just another kid to the general manager. When I got there, I was doing something I didn't enjoy. To borrow a phrase from Qoheleth, I looked around all was vanity, a chasing of the wind. So, I changed gears and ran my own computer shop. That worked for a while, but I had taken a hobby that I loved and tried turning it into a career. One of the things I discovered was that I didn't enjoy it anymore. This thing that had once brought me joy now felt like a chore. By taking away the freedom that I had when it was a hobby, I had lost the part that I loved. Again, all was vanity. In my pursuit of wisdom and knowledge I had always chased after anything that caught my interest so that I could learn more and grow as a person. The same thing happened when I got involved with the church. Because I haven't always been involved with the church. I did not grow up with it. It wasn't until I was an adult with a child of my own that the church really started to mean something to me. As it began to mean more, I wanted to learn more. I wanted to grow. I didn't want to be stagnant. The more I learned the more I wanted to share because I don't like keeping knowledge to myself. You can ask my kids. They can tell you that if I have knowledge of something, I'm going to share it. Probably more than they ever wanted to know. But I stumbled upon something that I didn't expect. The more I learned when studying and meditating on scripture, the more I had yet to learn. It didn't wear me out, because I had found something where I could share my insights and my knowledge and it not feel like a burden. I could share the wisdom I had gained and learn from others and feel fulfilled. I had found that Christ brought me peace and that there was always going to be more to learn. That I could continually grow. It brought me into ministry. The joy I found wasn't just the joy of learning and

the joy of teaching, but a joy that comes with real spiritual growth. That, as I strove to better nurture the congregations in my care, the more I grew as a person, the more I grew in Christ, the more I grew in wisdom and in years.

I could look back at my early days and I could be embarrassed over the messages that I gave when I first started out. That I may have rambled more than I wanted to, and I may not have been as polished as I could have been. I may have just been getting into ideas I couldn't quite fully describe. But I look back on them with fondness and it's because I know that as I grew, I grew because of the support I had from the people I was with. That we grew together because we grew together in wisdom. The more that you help me the more I can help you. I really got to understand community in a whole new way. I found that seeking wisdom and getting understanding is something precious. Because I'm always finding something new, and I always have something to look forward to. That knowledge is better than any silver or gold and wisdom more than precious jewels. Because I found community. I found family. So, I'm thankful as I grow another year older. I can think about my kids getting older and more independent. I can be thankful that I have been able to share my knowledge with them. I know that with them, I will continue to grow together with them in wisdom and in years. Just as we will continue to grow with you. I never want to take that for granted because I appreciate the opportunity that I have to serve you. Because I can see the many ways that I have grown because of you. I can see the many ways that my family has grown. And I am thankful. I pray that we may continue to grow together, growing in faith, in knowledge, in wisdom, in understanding, and in love. So, as I grow a little bit older, and hopefully a little wiser, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity that you have given me. May we all grow older and wiser in Christ our Savior. 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 – Theology Thoughts

Our current series is going to be a collection of theology thoughts from Pastor Cameron. Each week we will explore different aspects of how we live our faith. We will be looking at faith, prayer, works, forgiveness, scripture, and more. The more we learn about God, the more we grow in faith and love.

Next Week: The Unknown – Our next message is for All Saints Sunday, and we look at how we handle the unknown when we talk about death.

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 McGuiness	Janet Yokum
Donna Farley	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	

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