

September 23, 2018

James 3:3-18

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“Wisdom from Above”

As we begin this preaching time together, I invite you to do this short exercise with me. Look back at this past week. Think or reflect back and remember a time when you knew that God was with you, that God helped you or you were aware of God’s activity in this world. Maybe one of your needs was fulfilled and you were grateful to God for it. Maybe you were able to respond to somebody in a kind manner even though you were very irritated. Maybe you were a part of a project that helped somebody in need. By doing the this exercise we were able to go back and reflect on our lives, our behaviors, and actions, but also reflect on where God was in our lives. Reflection is God’s gift to us that open us up to God and God’s purposes in the world. Reflection creates space in our minds and in our hearts to invite God in and helps us receive the wisdom from above that James describes to us in chapter 3 of his book.

The book of James is written in a Christian Wisdom tradition giving us some practical advice on how to live our lives as Christians. The wisdom tradition the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible are the books that written to provide practical truths in life. These five books: Psalms, Songs of Solomon, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes especially provide practical ways of living and walking humbly with God. In the Proverbs it says that wisdom was with God at the Creation of the World. There are also books that are secondary source to the Bible. The volume of them are called Apocrypha. There is a whole book that is called the Wisdom of Solomon.

At our Bible study this past Wednesday we were looking at this passage and trying to understand the word wisdom. Is wise means being street-smart? Is it being book-smart? It is being shrewd? Is it insight or foresight? Is it all of those things? Does it have to do with knowledge? Or does it have to do with intelligence? Or we only become wise with age and experience? So, I looked up the Hebrew word for wisdom and wanted to see what meaning of it. Now I know that the letter of James was written in Greek but because James heavily relied on the wisdom tradition that he knew which was the Hebrew Bible I thought it would be wise to go with the Hebrew word. The Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokma*. Say *hokma*! It is feminine! I like that! From the analysis of this Hebrew word, *hokma* can only be described and not really given a definition because it is so complex. An author and theologian, Edward Root, did a great job of describing *hokma* in one of his articles. One of the components of the word *hokma* is about our faith and our heart. It is about seeing purpose and fulfilment in our live and it is about our walk with God. I think that James had this in mind when he talked about the wisdom from above.

The wisdom from above is about our close and every day walk with God. And it is closely connected to our awareness of God’s activity in our lives. This past week I was at a retreat and learning experience for those who were commissioned this year at the Annual Conference in Lakeside as provisional members. Our first day, our own Kim La Rue, who is the director of Adult Ministries and Membership Care here at Powell UMC, led a session on

Spiritual Formation. She was teaching us, the new and upcoming leaders of the church, how to keep finding new ways of connecting with God and seeking God in our lives. Because not only leaders and we all as Christians are called to this task of finding God in the circumstances of our lives. So the reflection exercise that we did right at the beginning helped us with it. I am back to our work of reflection. Our ability to think, to evaluate the situation and invite God into it. We as Christians are called to this work of reflection. The work of reflection is important to make sense of our lives, to continue to understand the purpose that God has for us and how we continue to be the church with Christ's mission in this world. Reflection is one of the pathways to our transformation and formation as Jesus's disciples. Our reflection happens when we come together as a community, in one on one conversations, Sunday School classes, and Bible Studies. Today is the Bible Sunday when we give our children their first Bibles. What a great day for you guys! Those Bibles look so great and so colorful!

Maybe some of you still have your first Bible. I remember my first Bible. I was a child, probably 10 or 11 years old. Some of you probably are surprised to hear that because you know that I was born in Soviet Union and I did not grow up going to church. But somehow my parents got me a kid version of the Bible with the main stories from the Bible. It had such beautiful glossy pictures. If I close my eyes, I can see them so vividly. But it is not the pictures or the glossy paper that I hold dear to my heart and I am shaped by. It is God's ability to sustain me and support me and giving me hope with all the times that I have read the Bible. As some of you know that I am going through an ordination process in the United Methodist Church and it is long and not very easy. And at the beginning of my ordination journey God gave me the verses that I have been leaning on these years. These verses are from 43d chapter of Isaiah,

“But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.”

These words have been life-giving to me. They remind me of the times that God has been with me and also give me hope that even in those hardest moments I am not alone.

So, kids, that is what the Bible will do in your life! how awesome is that you who got your first Bibles today! You can dive into the stories of our fathers and mothers in faith and receive the words of encouragement. When we read the Bible, the stories of the people in the Bible help us connect to our own lives, and help us see God there. When we memorize the verses from the Bible, they help be aware that God will never leave us or forsake us. When we go to the Bible studies, that work of reflection and formation happens in a community with our fellow Christians. God's word shapes us into who we are and helps us be more and more tuned in into

God's activity in the world. So, one of the ways that we can receive this gift of God, the wisdom from above is by opening up our Bibles, reading the stories and the words of encouragement, and by listening to what God is telling us.

So, today my friends my encouragement to myself, first, and then to you, is that we continue our work of reflection and continue to invite God into it as we open up our Bibles and let it shape us. So that the wisdom from above, the gift of God, can become a reality for us. And now receive this blessing from *Blessing upon Blessing* by Maxine Shonk,

“May you be blessed with wisdom of God who fills your heart with vision so that you may see all things with the eyes of God. May you have the wisdom and knowledge to discern God's desire. May you be drawn to a deeper awareness of God's activity in your life. May you give voice to that wisdom as you enter into communion with all God's people. May the God of wisdom bless you.” (p.27) Amen.