

SERMON – The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 20, 2009
Proverbs 31:10-31
Psalm 1
James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a
Mark 9:30-37

If I were to ask what is the reason why we come here week after week, I am sure I would hear some of the following reasons: I love to come to church because it makes me feel good; I love the liturgy and taking communion; I just love the sermons, they help me during the week; I want to be with the people I like; I love to sing praises to God; and I come because it is the right thing to do, and I am sure there are many other reasons.

But let us consider this reason. We come to church because we want to encounter God so that our lives can be changed. We come to seek the love that passes all understanding, the love that only God can give us, the love that is so deep, so wide and so unconditional. God is Love, and where God is, there is Love. I hope that when we come here, we can all feel God's Love.

The stories we hear each week are the stories of God's people, and they become our stories, because I am sure we can all identify at some time or another with many of stories we hear.

For instance, we have been reading for the past few weeks from the book of Proverbs as our Old Testament reading. I am sure most of us are familiar with many of the proverbs which we heard about when we were growing up as a child. The Book of Proverbs is divided into 3 sections: Wisdom for Young People; Wisdom for All People; and Wisdom for Leaders.

The word 'Proverb' comes from a Hebrew word that means, "to rule or to govern" and these sayings from Proverbs gives us advice for governing our lives. King Solomon, who was known as the 'wisest man who ever lived' left us a legacy of written wisdom; he wrote 3 books in the Bible, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

The passage we heard this morning is from the last chapter in Proverbs, "A capable wife who can find?" And then it goes on to give a long list of the capabilities of what a wife should be. I think we should look at this passage as an inspiration to be all that we can be. It teaches us to be industrious, to be resourceful and to be full of integrity. We are to fear God; we are to work hard; we are to care and respect each other; we are to be concerned about the poor; and we should all be wise in how to handle money. When we do these things we lead a life of enjoyment, honor and worth, and I think this applies to all of us.

So the book of Proverbs is very relevant to us today, it shows us how to live wisely; how to make good decisions and how to live according to God's ideal for us. We would be wise to turn to Proverbs frequently because there is a great deal of good solid advice in this book.

Now, James picks up right where Proverbs ends by asking who is wise and understanding among you. When we become boastful, selfish and envious of each other then these things are not of God, because they are all earthly, unspiritual and devilish. Now, if we live according to God's ideal, then we will show wisdom by our works, because everything from God is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits.

You and I know how hard it is to live up to God's ideal, but it is something we should be striving to do all the time. Our struggles help to strengthen our faith. Both books of Proverbs and James tells us how to live a godly life. When we come to this place of worship, it gives us another opportunity to seek God's forgiveness and to ask for God's strength and guidance as we learn to live peaceably, gently, and wisely.

We get another lesson in wisdom as we continue to hear Mark's story about Jesus and his disciples as Jesus is preparing them for his pending passion. Today we hear how the disciples are speechless twice in this story. Jesus has already told the disciples that the Son of Man will be betrayed into human hands, he will be killed, and in three days he will rise again. The disciples are speechless because they do not understand what Jesus is telling them. I guess the disciples were remembering the scolding that Jesus gave them the first time he warned them about his death. You may remember in Mark 8:32-33, Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that he was going to die, and Jesus in turn, rebuked Peter by saying, 'Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'

The second time the disciples become speechless in this story is when Jesus asks them what they were arguing about on their way to Capernaum. This time they do not want to own up to the fact that they were arguing about who is the greatest among them; they were too embarrassed. I guess we all have problems with power.

Jesus decides to give the disciples yet another lesson. He tells them that whoever wants to be first, must be last of all, and servant of all. How are we to take this statement of Jesus? Jesus has just turned our cultural assumptions about power and status, totally upside down. It has been so engrained into us that we must come first in our class, we must come first in the race, we must do everything possible to be at the top, then to hear Jesus say that in God's Kingdom, if we want to be first, we must be last, *and*, a servant of all.

Jesus uses a child to illustrate his meaning and puts a little child on his lap. You see, in Jesus' time, children were both powerless and defenseless and they totally relied on others for care. Children also had no legal rights so there would be nothing to gain by receiving a child. But Jesus says that if we receive a child in his name, we also receive Christ as well as Abba the Father who sent him.

I think Jesus is trying to tell us something here. Just as children are powerless and defenseless, we too have to practically strip ourselves naked of all the baggage we have acquired over the years. All the stuff that we carry around with us, things that we think are important in life, but really are not; we have to put them aside because to follow Jesus we have to free ourselves of all worldly things. We have to give up the power we yearn for, the merit and prestige we seek, so that we can be the last, and a servant of all, in order to enter the Kingdom. Remember the story of the rich young ruler when Jesus told him he had to sell everything in order to follow him? Jesus shows us that the greatest in God's Kingdom is the one who follows his examples.

So how do we help our children when we want them to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus but they are living in a society that tells them they should do it another way? I can only suggest that we tell them to be the best they can be with love, honesty and integrity; to reach out and be kind to all people and to respect everyone. Teach them that it is not so much the winning of the race that is important, but **how** we run the race. Did they stop to help the one who fell, or did they selfishly push those out of the way so that they could win? The focus should not be on 'me' but on 'others' and when we learn to live this way then the rewards are far more fulfilling than coming first. *If we want to be first, we must be last of all, and servant of all.*

We all want to feel worthy, and we all want to be loved. We come to Church to encounter God. We come to encounter God's Love which is *so deep, so wide and so unconditional*. We come as broken people, but this God who loves us so much is ready to forgive us and send us back out into the world filled with love, and joy, and peace. How can we not share this with others?

As we at Trinity move forward, it is hoped that we will show wisdom and understanding in the things we do here. We must begin to live our new Mission Statement. For those who were not at the luncheon last Sunday, we would like to tell you about our new Mission and Vision Statement. It is – **FAITH. COMPASSION. COMMUNITY. That through our faith, teachings and work, Trinity is focused on making Jesus Christ a living and tangible part of people's lives.** This statement defines who we are and what we are all about at Trinity. It should provide direction to all our activities, it should provide direction to all Vestry decisions and it should clearly communicate our purpose to all newcomers. These are not words we just came up with because they sounded nice; we came up with them because at Trinity our Faith and Worship is

important and meaningful. Our Compassion for Humanity means a lot, and our Outreach ministry is very important.

To build our **Faith**, we come to worship each week to encounter God; we learn through Bible Study; we attend various spiritual events that are offered; we sing in the choir because it is our passion, and we have fellowship with each other. Through our faith we will show others that Jesus Christ is very real to us and is present with us in this moment.

We have **Compassion** for humanity as we care for others; as we visit the sick; as we take care of those in our congregation who need our help, and as we step forward to help with social justice. Jesus showed his compassion for others and has told us that we are to bear one another's burdens. Here again we can show that Jesus is a living and tangible part of our lives.

We work on building community with our members by welcoming all people; loving each other and treating each other with respect. We reach out in our **Community** to feed the hungry, clothe the naked; give a drink to the thirsty; and offer shelter to the homeless. These are just a few of the commands that Jesus left us and what better way to bring Jesus to others than when we serve them. Over the next few weeks our Outreach Committee will be putting together some opportunities that a lot of us will be able to participate in. I invite you to help us to serve those outside this building. The more we are out in our surrounding community, the more people will hear about Trinity Church and the more people will see the love of Christ working through us.

As we accept new challenges here at Trinity, it would be wise for us to seek God's guidance as we take the time to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to God's people. We are therefore giving our members an opportunity to come together for a Prayer Vigil on Saturday, Sept. 26th from 12 noon to 5:00 pm. Enjoy the peace and quiet of this place as we spend a few minutes in the presence of God, and do not be surprised if we should have an encounter with God; you never can tell. There is a poster to sign up for when you are able to come to pray, and if you are unable to come here, you may still sign up to pray at home; but pray we must.

May we be wise and understanding in all that we do so that we can draw near to God as we live in **Faith** showing **Compassion** to all as we do the good works we are called to do in the **Community**.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.