

Bible Study
Proper 19, Year B
September 13, 2015

(RCL) Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 19; James 3:1-12, 14-17; Mark 8:27-38

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8:34-35)

Proverbs 1:20-33

What a challenging passage: on first glance it appears as though Woman Wisdom, the female personification of wisdom found in the book of Proverbs (and elsewhere), is merely scolding humanity for ignoring her calls. If we take a closer look, we can see that Woman Wisdom inserts herself into the center of commerce and community life of the city (vs. 20-21), where people are the most distracted from choosing the “fear of the Lord” (vs. 29). It is interesting to note that she feels that people lose sight of following God when they are attending to business and engaged in their daily tasks.

- In what ways do our daily tasks and work distract us from following the way of God?
- In what ways might you act or behave differently in your work or daily tasks if you were following the way of God while engaged in those tasks?

Psalm 19

This Psalm makes everything seem easy. If you follow the Law of the Lord, you are blameless in the sight of the Lord and are without sin. Easy as pie. Verse 8 tells us that the “law of the Lord is clear”, which is true sometimes, but other times it is not so clear.

- What are we to do when the law of the Lord is not so clear?
- What tools have you found helpful in discerning a course of action when you are finding the law of the Lord hard to decipher?
- What are some of God’s “laws” that are very clear for you?
- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you doubted your understanding of God’s laws? What was that experience like?

James 3:1-12

Here we have another very challenging passage from the book of James, warning readers about the power of words and speech. James cautions us that the tongue controls the entire body and has the power to guide the whole self toward goodness or away from goodness. If we use our mouths to proclaim the goodness of God on Sundays and to talk badly about our coworkers come Monday morning, which way are our tongues guiding our whole selves? James says that the same spring can’t produce fresh water and brackish water; the brackish water will always contaminate the clean water, and no amount of clean water can completely dilute the contaminated water.

- We have been meditating, in today’s readings, about the law of the Lord and how to follow the way of the Lord in confusing and unclear situations. What would it look like to be guided by our own speech and tongue?
- What would you change about the way you use words in order to guide you into a closer relationship with God and closer to God’s goodness?

Mark 8:27-38

One general theme from the readings today is following in the way of the Lord in both action and speech. We have been asked to consider wisdom in our daily life and work. We have been told that the law of the Lord is clear, and that those who follow it are blameless. We have also been told that the tongue controls the entire self and that it can guide us into goodness. Each of these passages challenges us to avoid taking the easy and thoughtless way out of a situation, and choose God's way. Here Jesus lays this message down loud and clear: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." The way of the cross is costly and Jesus never attempts to hide this fact from his followers.

- What are some gospel truths that you think are worth setting aside your own comfort, or even your own life for?
- In what ways have these passages encouraged you or challenged you to consider what it means to follow Christ differently?
- What situation in your life or community might Jesus be calling you into? In what ways is that a comfortable call? An uncomfortable one?

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