



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 17, Proper 19 – Year B
September 16, 2018

[RCL]: Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 19; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38

Proverbs 1:20-33

In this passage from Proverbs, Wisdom herself has some strong warnings for the reader. She shouts from a busy street corner, pointing out the faults of the “simple ones” and “scoffers”. “Because you have not heard me or heeded me,” she says, “I will laugh when calamity strikes you.” What’s more, when panic strikes, when you are distressed and anguished, you will call for me, but I won’t answer. Ouch! This doesn’t exactly seem like the kind of feel-good literature we expect from the Good Book. In fact, reading this passage, we don’t find the comfort we often seek from God, at least not at first blush. It’s important to remember that this passage isn’t meant as an indictment; it is a statement of God’s truth. Wisdom does not withhold herself from those who earnestly desire her. Rather, those who refuse her have already condemned themselves.

- What kinds of institutions in our world have condemned themselves because they reject Wisdom’s calls and fail to act morally? What lessons do we learn from them?
- How does God teach us to act over and against the powers and principalities of this world?

Psalm 19

In verses one through six of this well-known psalm, the author contemplates the ways in which the created order displays the glory of God. Though the universe lacks voice or language, it still testifies to its magnificent creator. Partway through the psalm, however, the subject changes. Verses seven through eleven discuss the Lord’s perfect law, righteous judgments, and sure testimony. The question is: What do the two themes have to do with each other? Perhaps both the created world and God’s law are part of a divine natural order, revealing to us truths about God. Just as the rising and setting sun sustains life on earth and gives voice to the splendor of the Creator, so too do God’s laws, statutes, and commandments give purpose to the lives of his people, reviving their hearts and instilling wisdom in them.

- How do you notice and appreciate God in creation?
- How is God’s will manifested in the world around you? How is it revealed to you through scripture, tradition, and personal experience?

James 3:1-12

“So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.”

What we say matters. God has been telling us this from the beginning. Genesis tells us that God spoke the world into being. God then spoke humans into being, making them in God’s own image and giving them the power to name animals—“every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature”—and each other. Almost everyone has had the privilege of naming something, maybe a beloved pet or stuffed animal. Often parents agonize over giving a new baby the perfect name—even going so far as to make sure that his or her initials don’t spell out anything inappropriate! To name something or someone is a tremendous responsibility, because to name something is to begin to form its identity. With that kind of power comes the temptation to believe we are in total control. Just because we have the power to name, doesn’t mean we should confuse ourselves with God. Instead, we would do well to remember that all our language was given to us by a God who made us in his image.

- Who or what have you had the privilege to name? What was that experience like for you?
- How does your use of language draw you closer to God? How does it place you further away?

Mark 8:27-38

Peter just doesn’t get it, but we can’t blame him. Sometimes we don’t either. Peter rebukes Jesus for teaching his disciples that he will suffer and die. Those of us on this side of the Resurrection may understand what Jesus is getting at, but Peter doesn’t. In Peter’s mind, a Messiah can’t die! Heck, the words *Messiah* and *dying* don’t even belong in the same sentence. Leave it to Jesus to remind Peter that he has some more learning to do. “Get behind me, Satan!” When pondering this famous phrase, don’t get too caught up in the word “Satan.” It simply means “accuser.” Focus instead on the “get behind me” part. Jesus commands Peter to get behind him because it’s from there that Peter can continue to follow Jesus. “Get behind me,” Jesus says. He is reminding Peter that God is in charge. This is an important reminder for us all. We don’t have to have all the answers; that’s why we follow the one who does.

- Do you ever need to be reminded that it’s enough simply to follow?
- How might you practice being a better follower of Jesus in the week to come?

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