

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Sunday, August 15, 2021

The Book of Proverbs

“Proverbs: Disciplined Disciples”

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcome and Announcements

Hello! Welcome to worship at the First Presbyterian Church in Plymouth. Today is Sunday, August 15th, and I am so glad that you are joining us from wherever you are watching today.

My name is the Reverend Emily Campbell, and I'm delighted to be leading this morning's service along with the Reverend Mark Hovermale, who is here serving as our liturgist, and with the help of Darlene Maginley, our Director of Children's Ministry who will be speaking to the children later in our service. Friends, I'm delighted, as well, today to welcome Natalie Corrigan as our guest musician. Natalie grew up as a child of this church. She first sang here in our children's choirs, but she's now a college student and an opera singer. She actually has just returned from singing in Italy and we are delighted that she will be sharing her talent with us later in our service.

[Special note to readers of this online worship transcript: Susan Underhill was unable to videotape Natalie Corrigan singing for the Online Worship Service due to an electrical power outage.]

Before we get going, I want to give you a quick building update. Thanks to all your generosity in response to the Refresh, Renew and Return campaign, I can tell you that we are not videotaping in the sanctuary this week because our 40-year old sanctuary carpet, which has served God and this church so well has been completely ripped out over the last week. By next week we will have new carpeting fully installed. Many thanks to our Building and Grounds committee for all their help with this process and also a special thanks to them as they have accommodated the needs of our church family as we held a memorial service on Saturday for a beloved church member, Carol Packard.

It is our plan, at this time, to continue with our 9:30 a.m. parking lot service and with our 11:00 a.m. sanctuary service. This, of course, is in addition to our online service. That's our plan through Labor Day weekend. However, on Sunday, September 12th, our sanctuary service will move to a new time. It will begin at 9:30 a.m., and we will be live streaming that service for everyone who wishes to watch at home. Our Upper Room service also will be returning this fall, at the time it was pre-COVID, at 11:05 a.m. We are waiting to announce the exact date of that reopening for the Upper Room.

Friends, let us now prepare our hearts for worship as we turn now to God in prayer.

Rev . Mark Hovermale – Opening Prayer

Let us pray. Lord, as we come before you this morning, we are just so thankful for the opportunity to get to worship you. We pray that we listen and apply the correction, the discipline, and wisdom presented to us today through the book of Proverbs.

We know there have been times that we have done things that have not been pleasing to you. And we know there are times that we should have done things that we did not do. We come before you now, and just take a moment and confess those to you.

We praise you, Lord, for just being you. But, especially, we take a moment, and we say thank you for your grace, your mercy and your forgiveness of our sins. Let this service bring glory and honor to you. Amen.

Joyful Ringers Bell Choir and Congregation play and sing “We Are Called To Be God’s People” (previously videotaped)

Darlene Maginley, Director of Children’s Ministry – Children’s Sermon

Good morning, kids. I have a challenge for you! I would like you to get a piece of paper and a pencil and write down all of your jobs. Now at your age all of you should put being a student at the top of the page. That's your most important job right now--going to school and learning. But you have some other jobs that you may not think about. You may be the dog walker, you may be the dish washer, or the trash taker-outer. You probably have a lot of jobs that you don't think about, so I'm going to challenge you to list all of the jobs that you do that you can possibly think about. When you get done with that list, I want you to look at it and see if you have a job title on there called “disciple.”

Well, I know if I was making a list of all my jobs, that I probably would not put disciple on the list. But, oddly, the Bible has a verse that talks about that we should be like little ants. The ants are always busy gathering food during the summer so that they have it for the winter so that they can survive. They gather things that they need to live. That's what Jesus wants us to do. He wants to go out and gather people for him. He wants us to be disciples.

We don't usually think about being a disciple as part of our job, but that is the most important job that God has for us! Being a disciple means that we tell other people, we tell our friends, and our classmates, even some grownups, about how much Jesus loves us, about how Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins, and how He gives us life with Him in heaven.

So when you are looking at your job description today, I want you to remember--at the very top of the list, to write the word “disciple.”

Let's pray together. Dear father, thank you for giving us jobs to do. Thank you for letting us help our families by being dish washers and dog walkers and trash taker-outers. And thank you for giving us the opportunity for the most important job that we could ever have and that's being your disciple. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Hovermale – Scripture Readings

Our scripture lessons today are found in Proverbs, chapter 6, and also in Proverbs, chapter 15.

Proverbs 6:6-11

- ⁶ Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!
- ⁷ It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,
⁸ yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.
- ⁹ How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
When will you get up from your sleep?
- ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—
¹¹ and poverty will come on you like a thief
and scarcity like an armed man.

Proverbs 15:19

- ¹⁹ The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns,
but the path of the upright is a highway.

Proverbs 15:31-33

- ³¹ Whoever heeds life-giving correction
will be at home among the wise.
- ³² Those who disregard discipline despise themselves,
but the one who heeds correction gains understanding.
- ³³ Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD,
and humility comes before honor.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Campbell – Sermon: “Disciplined Disciples”

Let us pray. Guide us, oh God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth, find freedom, and in your will may we discover the gift of your peace. Amen.

Friends, this past week I was on a bit of a “hunt.” Now, given that we are studying the Old Testament book of Proverbs, I would love to tell you at this time that I was hunting for wisdom. But the truth is I was hunting for food! You see, I had forgotten to bring my dinner with me to church. After dropping one child at an event, and having to rush into a meeting later that evening, I found myself with this 30-minute window, and thought if I'm going to eat, this is it. With reflection, I realize I should have thought, “I'm going to the grocery store!”

Instead, I decided that I would hunt fast food. Well, apparently, “fast food” no longer exists! I learned that after going to Taco Bell and not being able to get into the parking lot because the line went around the block. But this was, surely, not a usual circumstance. When I turned around and made my way to another fast food establishment, to Wendy's, I was delighted when I found an empty parking lot. However, my delight did not sustain, as when I went to order, I discovered that Wendy's had closed at three o'clock, and no longer serves dinner. Across the street, I tried to go to McDonald's, but with the lines being ten cars deep in both lines. I gave up the search.

Friends, what has happened in this land in which we live is that shortages have caused crazy conditions everywhere! I'm not actually sure today which is worse--people being afraid to work because of the COVID virus, or people not wanting to work, or feeling that they don't need to work. This model doesn't seem sustainable in our lives together as a whole. Yet, this is the world in which we live today!

The words of Proverbs, chapter 6, act as a warning to us, as to what happens if none of us take up that call to work. “Go to the ant, you sluggard,” it says in chapter 6, beginning at verse 6, “and consider its ways and be wise.”

Proverbs, chapter 15, at verse 15, says, “The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns.” In other words, they bring problems upon themselves.

Now the sluggard is just one of many fools described within the book of Proverbs. There are listed, among them, those who are obstinate and the troublemaker. The book of Proverbs describes all these types of fools in detail, teaching us through their descriptions, how to be wise, how to avoid certain life plans and paths, and how to be successful in our living.

Proverbs 6, beginning at verse 6, is probably the lengthiest version of teaching on the subject of the sluggard. The sluggard is translated in other Bible translations as lazy bones or a lazy person. But I think it's most helpful for us to describe the sluggard as Tim Keller does in his devotional on the book of Proverbs, where he writes sluggards are fools that make constant excuses for their small surrenders. They are surprised or assaulted when poverty comes their way, as the result of many smaller life opportunities or choices that they have let go, or slipped away. They have moved into poverty by inches and minutes because of their individual choices that have become cumulative to not work at all.

Friends, this passage has a lot to teach us about our lives today, and about how to live successful lives. But before we go more deeply into this teaching, I want you to hear this message very clearly. Many of us who are so very hardworking are going to read these words and think yet this is another call from God for us to work harder. God has always, since the very beginning of time, designed that we would live between seasons of work and rest. This is not a call for you to let go of rest. This is a call for us to simply work smarter!

Think with me for a minute about the creation of the world. When God gave us the world he took the seventh day to rest. When the Ten Commandments were laid out for us, as they are explained in both the Old Testament books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, we are told there that we are called to live into a pattern where we honor the Sabbath day.

It says in Deuteronomy, chapter 5, verse 12, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work but the seventh day is a Sabbath. On it you shall not do any work. Remember that you

were once slaves in Egypt and the Lord brought you out of there with an almighty hand and an outstretched arm.”

Now those words about the history of God's activity and His people are there to remind us that God will care for us. God longs to care for us! And as it was in the past, so it will be with us today. As we trust God with the whole of our time, with seasons of both work and rest, Jesus himself says as it is recorded in Matthew's gospel, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Friends this call, to work is not a call to work without limit! It's a call to work with balance, finding the rhythm between work and rest. So it is we are told in Proverbs chapter 6 to look to the ant as an example. It says, “Go to the Ant, you sluggard. Consider its ways and be wise. It has no commander, no overseer, or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.”

The call is for us to work hard, to be self-motivated as is the experience of the ant. Now if we are supposed to follow the example of the ant, there are several things that we can highlight as to what makes the ant such a model for our own work and for life. The first of these is that the ant is hardworking, indeed the ant is industrious. It is, as I've already said, a self-starter and self-motivated. They do not practice delayed gratification but move forward with the work that they have to do today.

It's no wonder that within the Marvel Universe, that out of all the superheroes that could be named after an insect, we have Ant Man as the one that proves themselves to be truly super and truly successful. There are reasons why the ant is highlighted both by the writer of the Old Testament book of Proverbs and even within our own lives today. The answer is not only hardworking ants are wise to harvest whenever they can, they make the best use of the timing of life and the opportunities given to them. They store food during their summer, so in the winter they do not lack food. They rest when they feel the need to rest. They work when they are able to work and they value unity and they value teamwork. That is something that we can really learn from these small insects. Together they are able to accomplish far more than they are on their own.

Even within our Christian lives, although in each of us shines the light of Christ in all that we do, when that light is put together with other Christians in service, in mission, that light becomes brighter and brighter and becomes a light that those within the community can see. There's a blessing in allowing our work to be coupled with the work of others in unity.

That's true, as well, in worship. Our praise of God becomes so much louder when we are united with other Christians and that praise is reflected in a larger community.

So ants are hard working. They are wise in their use of time. They value unity and teamwork. There's a very famous quote, an African proverb, that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go *far*, go together.” Ants are not afraid to take on problems bigger than themselves. They work together to tackle those problems, and in that decision to work together and to tackle large problems, they are able to do far more than they would be able to by themselves.

Our call to “team up” is not only a call to work together, but to work with God in providing light and hope within this land. We do in fact partner with God in all that we do and although we are working, trying to find that balance, we also have the promise in scripture

in John chapter 5, at verse 17, that says, "My father is always at work to this very day and I am working too."

Friends, today we find hope and direction and correction in these words about the sluggard. Let me also remind you of one other thing. God ultimately wants us to focus more on what we want to become rather than on what we are actually doing.

To illustrate this I go beyond the ant. I want to turn our attention to one last text, found in Luke's gospel. It's the story of Mary and Martha. There, you may remember that Martha, the hard worker, is criticized for working hard behind the scenes preparing a meal for Jesus to have with his disciples, while Mary sits at Jesus' feet and learns. Jesus says to Martha, "Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed or, indeed, only one. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her."

Now this teaching seems in some ways in direct contrast to the teaching we've had from Proverbs about the sluggard that calls us to work in smart ways. Yet ultimately what Jesus teaches us that what is smart is to be able to be in God's presence and while we are in God's presence, allow God to inform who we are called to be. As we understand that call, we are then able to go out and shine a light for Christ in the world.

Friends, there is a God-given balance in each of our lives between work and rest. There is a call to work smart, to be hard working, yet work together to use the best use of time and seasons gifted to us. And there's a call for us to put God first and to allow God to shape who we are becoming today so that tomorrow we will be an even stronger witness to Christ!

May God help us all as we seek to live into this teaching. Amen.

Rev. Campbell — Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Would you please pray with me. Holy God, at times we admit we act like fools. We are obstinate and unwilling to seek your wisdom or be corrected. At times we also act like sluggards, unable to find that balance between work and rest or simply working in ways which are not smart. Help us, dear God, to focus now on who you want us to be. Come help us to be those people as we reach out to everyone who is in need.

At this time we pray for those for whom we know life is hard at this moment. We remember those dealing with flooding, close here to our homes, and we pray for those who have dealt with fires and landslides all in the last week. Lord, bring healing and help in each of these situations, we pray. We pray, Lord, for those who are sick and for those who care for the sick. We pray for those who grieve, especially for those whose grief is raw. Lord, please bring comfort and your presence and your peace to them, we pray.

Help us, Lord, to give to you all those areas of our lives that trouble us or bring us anxiety. Help us to trust you with our future and every aspect of our lives. This we pray in the strong name of Jesus Christ, your Son, who has taught us when we pray to say together,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Chancel Choir sings "*I Am Not My Own*"
Videotaped on Impact Sunday, November 17, 2019

Rev. Campbell – Benediction and Blessing

Friends, as we go from here today, let us go with wisdom, willing to accept needed correction. May we go from here in the peace of God, in the love of Christ, and in the power of God's Holy Spirit at work within us, this day and always. Amen.