

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Sunday, July 4, 2021

The Book of Proverbs

“Faith of the Founding Fathers”

Rev. Mark Hovermale

Rev. Mark Hovermale — Welcome, Announcements, and Opening Prayer

Good morning! Welcome to our online service for the 4th of July. May I be the first to wish you a happy 4th of July.

A big thank you to Susan Underhill and Rev. Ashley and Shannon Abernathy and the musical team in helping make this service happen.

We have a few quick announcements today. The first has to do with our worship schedule through the remainder of the summer. Through July 18th, the parking lot worship service is going to still be at 10:00 in the morning. You don't have to preregister now. (Some of you were like, “I never preregistered!”) That's okay. You don't have to preregister anymore. Fellowship time will be at 9:30. Join us for coffee, lemonade, and cookies so you don't want to miss that at 9:30, before the 10:00 o'clock parking lot worship service.

Rev. Ashley Ashley is preaching next week on July 11. Then her husband Brendan Ashley is preaching the week after on Sunday, July 18.

Now, July 25th! Remember that on Sunday, July 25th, the parking lot worship service moves to 9:30 a.m. That's so we can have the sanctuary service at 11:00. Yes, the sanctuary service is happening at 11:00 a.m.! So on July 25th, the parking lot worship service moves to 9:30 a.m. and the sanctuary worship service happens at 11:00 a.m.

Are you confused yet? Don't worry, I've got another one for you. Starting September 12, the Sunday after Labor Day, (Can you believe it? We're already talking about Labor Day!) the church is fully reopening with Sanctuary worship service at 9:30 a.m. and the Upper Room worship service at 11:05 a.m. So, again, beginning Sunday, September 12, the Sanctuary at 9:30 a.m., and the Upper Room at 11:05.

If you can't keep track of everything, Susan will make sure it's online for you so you can look at the church's website, FPCP.net, and figure all of that out.

With this, we will come to our Lord in prayer.

Lord, we come before you and we just thank you for the opportunity to worship, whether online or in person. We thank you for all the people that make this happen. We pray that wherever we're watching this, we would take a moment and just reflect on how grateful we are to not only live in a country where we have the freedom to worship you, but most importantly, a Savior that we can worship.

Let this service just fully focus on you and bring us closer to you, Lord, I pray. Amen.

Well, I know you're watching online, but if you were at the parking lot worship service last week a really special thing happened. Pastor Ruth Azar was presented with a check on behalf of First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, on behalf of the Fitness in Christ team, for well over \$14,000 to provide them with money for their ministry and specifically for their new parking lot. And listen. We're not doing this *for* them. We're partnering *with* them! Pastor Ruth has done incredible work there and we're just blessed at First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth to be able to partner with them in any way we can. Thank you to all who contributed. Pastor Ruth Azar would want me to tell you, "Thank you so much."

Shannon Abernathy sings Hymn #728 "God of the Ages"
Kimberly Swan accompanies on piano

Rev. Hovermale — Sermon, Part One

In our sermon today, I'm going to look at the faith of our founding fathers. It's going to be in three parts. There is no discussion of theme. I'm just starting off with Part One. Here's what we're going to do. Part One is going to look at the history of our country, that is, the past. Part Two is going to look at the present, where we are now. In Part Three, we'll look at where we're going, where we *can* go in the future.

As we celebrate our country's independence and the revolutionary ideas of freedom, brought about by the Revolution, and all the things we have to be thankful for, I thought it would be good to look back at the history of the founding of our country, specifically in terms of the faith of the founding fathers. Now, I'm a little bit of a history buff and so I've been reading quite a bit about this and I'm going to spend this first part of the sermon just reading you some quotes from the founding fathers and some of our former presidents. I think it will give insight into how this country, how the Republic was formed.

I was reading a textbook—yes, I've been reading a history textbook because I'm a dork like that! It says, and this contradicts an often reported notion that most of the founders were Deists. The majority were believers, in the common understanding of the term. When I went on to read in the Patriots' Guide, it said this.

"It goes without saying, of course, that most of these men were steeped in the traditions and teachings of Christianity. Almost half the signers of the Declaration of Independence, almost half, had some form of seminary training or degree. Now that makes a lot of sense, as I reflect on our country and how it got started.

George Washington's 1752 handwritten manuscript of his book contained a prayer and I want to read it to you. It said,

"I only beseech thee to be merciful to me, in the full pardon of my sins for the sake of thy dear Son and our only savior, Jesus Christ, who came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. Thou gave your Son to die for me."

George Washington actually went on to write about virtue and character. He wrote,

“To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian.”

John Adams, founding father, the first Vice President and the second President of the United States, said,

“Without religion, this world would be something not fit to mention in polite company; I mean hell.”

It's pretty dramatic. In his diary for February 22nd, 1756, he actually said,

“Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love and reverence toward Almighty God... What a Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be.”

Even Daniel Webster, (Yep, *that* Webster!); he was also a senator and Secretary of State,

“Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens.”

Now John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States, wrote,

“Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers and it's the duty as well as a privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for rulers.”

Now those are some of the founding fathers. Before I end this first part of the sermon, I want to highlight two more recent presidents. President Harry S. Truman, on February 15th, 1950, when he was addressing a group, said,

“The fundamental basis of this nation's law was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings which we get from Exodus and Saint Matthew, from Isaiah and Saint Paul.”

Finally President Ronald Reagan said, on February 3rd, 1983, and these words were very convincing to me,

“Of the many influences that have shaped the United States of America into a distinctive nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible. The Bible and its teachings helped form the basis for the Founding Fathers' abiding belief in the inalienable rights of the individual, rights which they found implicit in the Bible's teachings of the inherent worth and dignity of each individual.”

Wow! I don't normally read from my notes like that, but I hope you heard where many of our presidents and our founding fathers based this country's start up. I think that's important as we go to the next part of the sermon which talks about where we are right now.

Rev. Ashley S. Ashley — First Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3:1-4 (NIV)

¹ My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
² for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.

³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.

⁴ Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.

Rev. Hovermale — Sermon, Part Two

For Part two, we're going to look at our current situation. The question comes up as I read from the quotes from the first part of the sermon, is, what has happened? Violence and crimes are at the highest points ever. Uncontrolled anger and hostility towards anyone, especially people who disagree with you; a feeling, almost, of superiority, that now we've arrived at this time in history, we know so much more than anyone did before us. Self-centeredness in our country and individual lives is unlike anything we've ever seen.

We are a far cry from,

“Ask not what your country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country.”

as John F Kennedy said.

I think we are more divided as a country than any time in history, including the Civil War. I have just finished reading a book on Abraham Lincoln, and as I look at Lincoln's time in the White House and of the period of the Civil War, I realized we're probably more divided than even then.

So what has happened? The answer, I think, is found in the first two verses of Proverbs, chapter 3, which was read earlier:

My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.

Simply put, be honest! We have forgotten God's teachings and his Word. This seems pretty dramatic but let's think about it. The Ten Commandments, which were in every courtroom, are now barred in many places. God has been removed completely from the public school system in the last thirty years completely.

Basic Christian teachings and values and virtues are now pushed to the side as completely wrong, or not applicable in today's culture. We have really done the opposite of observing Proverbs 3, verses 1 and 2, and our country has systematically eliminated God from the equation.

Anger, hatred, violence, division--just to name a few things, have taken His place. As I look at my notes, I have this one thing I want to share with you. To give you one example, you see the violence and the anger toward individuals today, people hurting each other, killing each other, tearing each other apart on social media.

If we follow the Biblical principle and put the Bible first in this country, we would say that everyone is made in the image of God. Therefore I cannot hurt that individual verbally or physically, because they are made in the image of God, just like me.

Think about the people in our lives that we treat poorly. If we thought of them as being made in the image of God, just like me, that changes the way we treat them. That's just one Biblical principle! If the Bible was where it needed to be in our country and in our own lives, the world would look like a lot different place.

In Part Three we're going to look at what we can do. Let's check that out.

Rev. Ashley — Second Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3:5-12 (NIV)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;

⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.

⁸ This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.

⁹ Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;

¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

¹¹ My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,

¹² because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.

Friends, these are the words of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Hovermale — Sermon, Part Three, "Where Do We Go From Here"

Well, we've looked at how our country was formed—as a republic. Then, just previously, we looked at where our country is now. It is a pretty tough current situation. So where do we go from here is the question. What are we going to do to make our country a different place?

I think two verses from Proverbs, chapter 3, contain the answer to what we can do.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;

⁶in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Now I don't want to look at these two verses in the national sense or the state sense, or the local government sense. I want to look at these verses as between you and your family. Just bring it down to that micro level. So, as I ask these questions and I make these statements and I preach a little bit here at the end, look at it in terms of your life and your family's life, because any change to our country is going to start with you and your family.

Four important words or phrases are found in Proverbs 3:5-6. The first one is "Trust in the Lord with all your heart". Trust--my dad preached a sermon a long time ago and he shared with me that the Hebrew term for "trust" really means throwing oneself down and lying extended on the ground. "We are to cast ourselves", my dad said, "completely at the feet of Jesus." We would all say we know what trust means. My trust looks different than that. Don't get me wrong. I mean, I have got to say this. I trust God but I have got Plan B and C and D lined up if God doesn't quite come through the way I want him to, or, you know, in *my* timing. That's not trust! When it says this, it says trust God with all your heart and it's talking about a trust where you, if God doesn't come through, you're in trouble.

Here's my question #1 for you. Are you an example of trusting in God within your family? Are you an example of trusting in God within your family? If your family were describing your trust, what would they say? "Yeah, Dad, Mom, my kid, they trust in God in everything." Or would they say something different?

The second phrase, "And do not lean", as in, "Do not lean on your own understanding." Now, "lean" in the Hebrew word literally means, "To support oneself, as though leaning for assistance." It basically means it's a crutch and it's a negative term. We are not to lean on our own understanding. I do it all the time, though. I mean, at least what I can Google. Right? It's all my little world, what I know.

The point of this section of this verse which is so easy to miss is to shift our perspective from our limited knowledge, from my limited knowledge to God's *unlimited* knowledge. Here's the deal: I don't have all the answers. Mark doesn't have all the answers, but I know who does—God! He actually wrote all the questions and now that I think about it, it doesn't mean that God promises I'm going to understand everything. There are things that have happened, tragedies in my life, that I will never understand this side of heaven. By not leaning on my own understanding, but leaning on God, so to speak, I may have a different perspective on those.

Question #2, would your family say you look for God's understanding or do you lean on your own understanding? Let me repeat that. Would your family say about you that you look for God's understanding, or do you just lean on your own understanding?

The third phrase: "Acknowledge Him. In all your ways, acknowledge Him". The Bible also says, "Submit to him." But *acknowledge* is what I want to concentrate on now. Now "all your ways" means in everything you do, none excluded, acknowledge God. You know when we say "acknowledge", it's not like, "Hey, Susan, how are you doing?" That's an acknowledgement. This is not what it means! I read one theologian's writing that says that this is not a nod of recognition, but an intimate knowledge of God. It can literally be interpreted, "In all your ways know Him or know God. That's different than just saying, "Hey, how are you doing?" In all your ways, know God!

Question #3, Are you leading or living in your family in a way that acknowledges God in everything you do? Let me say that again. Are you leading or living in your family in a way that acknowledges God in everything you do? What would my family say about me? “Well, Dad, Mark, he lives like that at church but when things don’t work right at home, he doesn’t respond, he doesn’t acknowledge God in that way.”

The first three important phrases or words that I have highlighted are commands and they represent *our* responsibility. My dad actually wrote that the way we respond to life's problems and situations is our choice and responsibility. But the last one of these important phrases “Make straight”, as in, “And he will make your paths straight”, that is God’s responsibility, It also means, basically, being meaningful as well, where your path is straight and meaningful. No, God doesn’t promise “easy”.

As I finish up here, I don't want you to think I'm saying that God can make our paths straight and that everything is going to be easy. Tragedies occur all the time in our own lives. Things will never make sense this side of heaven. God doesn’t always give us the whole perspective. He doesn’t say he is going to give us a Maglite. It’s just a lamp, just enough to get us through every day and trusting in him. But I think this, if we follow the first three words, “trust, do not lean on our own understanding, and acknowledge”, and not forgetting God’s teaching and keeping his commands in our family’s lives and in our own lives, then God will bring us in our journey to a place where our lives are going straight and meaningfully. I think if our own families can do that and if we can do that, change will begin with us. Ultimately our country can come back to Him but it starts with you and me. Amen, and thanks be to God!

Rev. Hovermale – Prayers of the People and The Lord’s Prayer

Let us pray. Lord, we come before you and we are indeed in awe and grateful just for the fact that there is nowhere we can go where you will not find us. All-knowing and all-powerful, you know us intimately and we cannot hide from your presence. We pray that we would truly trust you with our hearts and our lives.

We take a few moments to pray for those who are hurting today. We lift up those who've lost jobs and security, friends and family during these troubling times. We pray for help and peace to come their way through you.

We think of those touched by the tower collapse in Florida, those lives lost, and families affected. We don't have answers. Lord, we just pray for you to wrap them in your arms today.

We think of all the ministry centers and mission organizations who are serving you during these times. We pray for our Thrift Shop, and for ministries like Second Mile Center and Hope Clinic. Along with our national and international partnerships, we pray for them all to be strengthened as they serve their communities and share the hope of Jesus Christ.

We want to say thank you today. Thank you for the freedom we have in this country. We thank you for all the men and women who have defended this freedom in order that we may worship freely today, whether online or in person. We lift up our country and ask that you grant us mercy. We know we have strayed far from the Godly principles that this country was founded on. We pray for your mercy and grace that we may come back to you.

We pray all this and more in the name of your son Jesus Christ who taught us to pray saying,

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.

**Shannon Abernathy sings *"In God We Still Trust"*
Accompanied on piano by Kimberly Swan**

Rev. Hovermale — Benediction and Blessing

May change come in our country and may it come from you and your Word, Lord, and may it start with me and you.

May the blessing of God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and yours, today and forever more. Amen.