

# First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Sunday, July 18, 2021

The Book of Proverbs

“Wisdom: The Art of Listening to God”

Guest Pastor Brendan Ashley, preaching

## Rev. Ashley -- Welcome, Announcements, and Opening Prayer

Hello, friends, and welcome to the worship of God for Sunday July 18<sup>th</sup> here at the First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth! I am so glad that you have chosen to be with us today, in this time and place, to worship.

I'm excited, because my husband, for the second week in a row, will be joining us here in worship. Last week I preached, and Brendan served as my liturgist, but this week we're switching roles. Brendan will preach and I'm serving as his liturgist. Again, another fun experience for us and I am excited to hear what God has put on his heart to share with us today.

I am also joined in worship by Darlene Maginley. She will give us a message for our children. Our music today is provided by Peggy McKinley and Cindy Jones, and they are accompanied by Kimberly Swan. I am sure it'll be lovely to hear their voices with us this morning, as well.

I also, of course, want to give a big thanks to Susan Underhill and to Julie Thompson for all of their work behind the scenes, editing all of this videotape, and, of course, to Julie for the bulletin. It takes a team *and* a village to put our worship services together! I'm thankful for each person who gives their gifts for just that.

My friends, I'm going to share one big, exciting announcement. While it shouldn't be that big of a surprise, it doesn't make it any less exciting! Next Sunday, which is July 25<sup>th</sup>, we are hosting our soft reopening of our sanctuary. I bet there are quite a few of you at home that are celebrating right now, as you should! Of course, it has been many months since we've had an opportunity to celebrate and worship inside of our sanctuary. This will be my first worship service inside the building in the sanctuary, and I could not be more thrilled. I'm looking forward to seeing you in person. Pastor Mark will give our message that day.

Since we are adding a sanctuary service to our Sunday morning lineup, that does change our worship times a little. I want to remind you of those times now. Starting next Sunday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, our parking lot fellowship will move to 9:00 a.m. Then our parking lot worship will begin at 9:30 a.m. and will end at 10:10 a.m. Now the reason for that kind of specific time frame is to give time for our parking lot cars to be able to exit the parking lot so that all of those joining us for our 11:00 a.m. sanctuary worship service can come in and park.

So, again, our sanctuary worship service--that soft reopening of the sanctuary--will be at 11:00 a.m. Our pre-recorded online worship service will still be available starting at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings. I know that's a lot to take in. So as a reminder, you can find those times printed in your bulletin and also on the home page of the church website.

The “soft” reopening schedule, again, will last from July 25<sup>th</sup> through Labor Day weekend.

As part of our returning to the sanctuary, we did a kind of a soft opening raising of money, in order to refresh, renew and return to all of our worship spaces this fall. Thanks to your generosity and the humble ways that you all always give when we ask, we have raised over \$95,000 for this cause! You all never cease to amaze me with your generosity! I'm happy to report that the work that that money supports is well underway, so we are currently in the process of painting in the sanctuary as well as installing new lighting.

I'm excited for you all to enjoy the benefits of this refreshing of the sanctuary very, very soon. In addition, we have ordered new carpet for the sanctuary. That carpet has been ordered and is being created right now and is on its way to us. It should be arriving by the end of the month. Now, that does mean something important: The carpet will not be installed before the soft reopening, so we will be using chairs from the Upper Room in the sanctuary for that July 25<sup>th</sup> reopening.

But you know what? We have had worship services outdoors on a platform; we have built a preaching porch; we have learned how to worship online! This is just another opportunity to engage God in a different, quirky, fun, meaningful way, and it is only temporary!

I just want to invite you, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, to worship God in our sanctuary, to enjoy the beauty of our building, the joy of being together, and the knowledge that the carpet is on its way and the pews will be back very, very soon. Again, this is all part of the excitement of returning to our building. I want to thank you in advance for your patience, for your cooperation, and, of course, your understanding, as we continue with these building developments and these updates, these very exciting updates.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't thank our buildings and grounds crew for the hard work they have put in, not just this summer, as we've done these specific sanctuary updates, but, of course, this past year-plus. They have worked around the clock to complete, I don't even know how many projects, to be honest with you, a large number of important projects for our building. Their generosity and their dedication, their patience, their hard work, and skills are invaluable parts of our congregation, and I want to thank each one of them for their service.

I know, again, this is a lot of information. I invite you to check the newsletter that comes out on Fridays, and to check the bulletin. If you still have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Pastor Mark or myself. We are excited about all of this and more than happy to answer any questions that you might have, as we think about worship in the future and what it will look like for our congregation.

I invite you right now to prepare your hearts for worship today, in this moment, in whatever space God has brought you to, so let us do that together with prayer. Please pray with me.

Gracious and loving God, we gather together today as your people, although we might come from different spaces right now. We know that you unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Help us to focus in this very moment.

Remind us that even though we all participate in sin, that we are redeemed by your love and by your grace. During this time of worship, pour out your spirit upon us. May our

hearts be made ready to hear your voice, may our minds be made ready to take in your Word, and may our bodies be made ready to respond to your call.

We dedicate this time to you, oh God, as an act of obedience and thanksgiving for all that you have done for us. Amen.

**Peggy McKinley and Cindy Jones sing “The King of Love My Shepherd Is”  
Accompanied by Kimberly Swan**

**Darlene Maginley -- Children’s Message**

Good morning, kids. We have been talking about the book of Proverbs. Proverbs talks a lot about wisdom, and I wanted to share a little story with you.

I have a daughter who just graduated from high school; she has just turned 18. A few years ago, she missed school one day because she was sick. I told her to get all of her homework assignments from friends because she had plenty of time to catch up on the work that she had missed that day. The next few nights were going to be really busy at our house. Well, she got most of her homework, but there was one class that she didn't have a contact number for the only girl in the class that she knew. I suggested that she actually get out the school directory and make a phone call to the girl’s family to get her homework assignment. My daughter reacted with, “Mom, nobody makes phone calls any more!” and “What if her parents answer?” Well, for you older kids who happen to remember telephones before they became “smart,” you will understand how frustrated I was! For you younger kids, it’s enough to say that she did not get that homework assignment, and she made it really hard on herself. The next couple of nights she had a lot of work to do instead of being able to do it when she had some extra time.

The Bible talks about how we are supposed to gain wisdom, and that wisdom comes from moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles, and teachers. There's another place that we can get wisdom and that is from God, who is also a relative of ours. He is our Father in heaven. He has given us a whole giant book full of wisdom. Now before you tell me that nobody opens a big book and reads anymore, remember you can download your Bible on your smartphone!

So, let's say a prayer together.

Dear God, please help us to see wisdom in the people around us. Please help us to open the Bible and read your beautiful words and to gain wisdom, and help us to use that wisdom every day of our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Brendan Ashley -- Scripture Readings**

**Proverbs 1:5 (NIV)**

Let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and let the discerning get guidance—

**Proverbs 1:7 (NIV)**

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,  
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

### **Proverbs 1:20-21 (NIV)**

Out in the open wisdom calls aloud,  
she raises her voice in the public square;  
on top of the wall she cries out,  
at the city gate she makes her speech:

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

### **Brendan Ashley -- Sermon -- "Wisdom: The Art of Listening to God"**

Let us pray. Heavenly father, we give you thanks for the opportunity to stand before you and deliver your Word. May the meditations of my heart and the words on my lips give glory and praise to you. With those who are listening, may you allow them to encounter you today, in new and in fresh ways that invigorates their life of discipleship. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Good morning, FPCP! We have been in this series, this month, on wisdom from the book of Proverbs. On July 4<sup>th</sup>, we heard from Pastor Mark on the importance of plumbing the depths of wisdom by looking to our founding fathers, to those who came before us, and passed down wisdom and knowledge and understanding for today's walk in our faith. Last week we heard from Pastor Ashley, and she talked about how wisdom is more valuable than gold and silver and rubies and just about anything we could ever store up on our own.

This week I'm going to be talking from Proverbs, chapter 1, verse 5. There's something here also for seasoned men and women, still a thing or two for the experienced to learn of wisdom in general, what is it, and why should we listen to it. Wisdom is something almost every society, culture, and civilization has. According to one author, wisdom is the right use of knowledge. Wisdom, in general, is good for living, like when the dentist says to brush your teeth, so you don't get cavities.

However, it's not really great information if you understand what he's saying but you don't actually do it. Or, in my case, a few weeks back we got stranded in Cleveland and it's because I didn't listen to my wife, Ashley, when she said something was up with our car's air conditioning. We ended up stranded in Cleveland!

So it's important to know what wisdom is, but it's also important to know what it *isn't*. It's not about what's new and flashy, a cool car and a house when you're neck deep in debt and about to lose everything. It's not about how smart and successful you are; it's not about your IQ. Obviously, it's good that you have a high IQ, but if you don't know how to use it and you don't know how to treat people, it's not really wise.

As someone on Facebook said when I did a survey about what do you think wisdom is, they said, and I heard this multiple times, "It's knowing that tomatoes are a fruit, but that doesn't mean they should end up in a fruit salad." That wouldn't taste very good, at least in my opinion!

Proverbs teaches general stuff like this. And lots of societies and cultures do this kind of thing; they try to guide you in the way of living and understanding. But for us, we're being called to Godly wisdom.

In our text today the Hebrew word for wisdom is "Hahkma." Can you say that with me. It's a fun word! Wisdom here is feminine and is personified as a woman as mentioned by Pastor Ashley last week. Wisdom is about knowledge, understanding and grace. As one friend described it, it's like an arrow being fired at a target.

If we listen and follow her, wisdom points us to what faithful living is, in relationship to God and others. She can access with those who came before us, as Pastor Mark talked about, as we learn to walk in faith today. Side note: this doesn't mean it will always be easy or comfortable, but it's going to be good and true. Heeding the warnings and lessons of our elders doesn't always mean the journey will be without pain and hardship, but it sure means that we are going to be walking with other people who are experiencing similar things along with us.

So Godly listening is wise listening. Proverbs 1, verse 5 asks us to listen so that we may begin to gain more wisdom, since wisdom isn't something that you really reach an endpoint with. Especially since when we're talking about God and understanding God and interacting with God and interacting with other people, the possibilities are really endless, as far as our short lives are concerned.

As humans, we're always listening; right? It's part of our hardwiring, biologically. If you are able to hear, hearing is something that's always happening. You're always taking in experiences, but this doesn't always mean that we're listening to God. So it doesn't really help if I stand up here and I say, "Hey, you should just listen more." Oftentimes, if you say that, it turns people off.

There is not one moment where we are not being bombarded with words--people speaking to us, television, radio, our to-do list going off in our heads, noises, children, you name it! On top of this, not only are we biologically wired to listen, we're also trained to *consume* information. We are inundated over and over through our phones and televisions.

Basically they are set up to cause dopamine hits in our brains, because it feels good to listen to your favorite radio show or political talk show or sports show or whatever it is.

Our society tells us, please take in as much information as you can, even if it means you never actually incorporate it into your life. Turn on and tune out! Now, you know, after a long, hard day at work, I love turning on hours of podcasts--sports or Netflix and tuning out. Sometimes it's just easier. I don't want to have to face the dishes that are piling up in the sink, you know, or to actually interact with my spouse. Sometimes, I just want to come home and sit down. And yet there's someone crying, someone yelling. Do you hear her?

In verses 20 and 21, it says that God has sent Lady Wisdom to stand at the edge of the street, to scream for us, to cry out for us. She wants to get our attention. The text says,

*"Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the market she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks."*

In the Hebrew, wisdom, when she's crying out, it's called "*Taronnah*." Say it with me again, Taronnah. What a beautiful word! If you are looking for a name to name a child, Taronnah is a really beautiful name.

To give a ringing cry, she is so full of joy! She invites everyone into this joy. She's not stuffy, she's dancing, she's singing, she's laughing, she's driving with the windows down, listening to the 'Summer of 69.' She's shouting, "Hey, Brendan! Hey, church! There's another way. Want to hear what I have to say? Want to join in?"

Verse 7 makes it clear where we must begin, and constantly return to, in our pursuit of wisdom, and that is, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. That sounds kind of scary, but just bear with me. Fear, in the Hebrew, is respect, a great respect for someone or something, and in this case, respect for God. First, wisdom calls us to fear the Lord and respect him by listening to her warning. She's crying out on the street corner, trying to warn us. Why do we need warnings?

Verses 10 through 19 in Proverbs, chapter 1, are warning us to be wary of the enticement of sinners. Back in Genesis, Adam and Eve decided they were content with the wisdom of the snake which promised them an easier and more comfortable path in life. They wanted more than what God had to offer. Proverbs is talking about people who know this and they keep doing it anyway. It is also a warning to each of us that if we think we can't be enticed, then we are fools, myself included.

The endless wisdom we are called to explore in relationship with God and one another leaves us vulnerable and out of our element of control. This is why I think listening to God is important. The Word of God's wisdom meets us in the midst of the overwhelming abundance of information that we run into on a daily basis, in the moments we just want to "numb out". It doesn't say, "Run away." If we don't want to listen for it, we will find ourselves lost, overwhelmed, and maybe even lulled to sleep in the world, not engaged.

Even, still, we need this warning because we often want to gain wisdom on our own terms. I want to do it my way. I don't want to do it in community. I don't want to have to hear what these other Christians have to say or what God has to say, or my neighbor has to say. Sometimes God catches us off guard with it. He has to give us his instructions and commands to know when and where to draw the line. We have to step into the ring and wrestle with God, realizing that we are always learning, growing, and exposed to the truth.

Some things come to us naturally. But wisdom is learning to take that gift, the thing that we're good at, and entrusting it in faith to God. Oftentimes we get knocked down. We might have to wallow and wail, and then at some point we look up and we see His hand extended out to us, because God isn't warning us in order to keep us down. God wants to help us back up! Not stepping in, not acting, not asking questions, not making attempts to live life for Him is what the fool and the simple do.

Sometimes listening to God isn't always great for us and our ego. I understand that. Sometimes it exposes us to our sin and brokenness. It opens us up to others seeing that we don't have it all together. Yet with these things in mind, we're also saying, "Father, I can't do it anymore. Please teach me your way. You know the way. I trust you. You've warned me. You're also taking me somewhere else."

This leads me to my second and final point. Wisdom--she calls us to fear the Lord and listen because our Father in heaven encourages us. He loves us. The image of respect, of

a healthy fear of the Lord used in verses 8 and 9, is that of a Father and a son, a parent with his child. We learn to respect and listen to God through prayer, His word, in community and in mission. Oftentimes, it's the still small voice, and not the attention-grabbing one that the world trains us to believe now. As, Henri Nouwen, one of my favorite spiritual writers, says,

*“The way of the disciple takes time with Jesus and listens to the wisdom that He brought to the world 2000 years ago and is continuing to bring to us today, the wisdom to take on flesh, to live, to die on the cross, to resurrect from the dead, ascend into heaven. It's asking Jesus to seize hold of us, our gifts and talents, wealth and riches, ego and loneliness, our sickness and diseases, so that He can bend them towards His way, His truth and His life. It's the same person that painted the picture of the father embracing the prodigal son in the gospels, who wants us to listen for His wisdom today.”*

As you go this week, remember the small voice found in the reading of the Word, in fellowship with your family in Christ, in the places of pain and hurt around you, in the beauty and in the light. Amen.

### **Rev. Ashley -- Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer**

Friends, let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we long for wisdom, but we often prefer it to be our own. We cover our ears and ignore you, our still small but very present voice. We drown out your gift of wisdom as she seeks to get our attention, believing instead that we know better or wanting to decide when and how we welcome Lady Wisdom.

Forgive us, Oh Lord, for our selfishness and inflated sense of pride. Humble our hearts and awaken us to the wisdom that comes only from you. Teach us to pay attention to wisdom's shouts of joy and allow us to join her dance as she celebrates your promises. May we learn to trust in you above all else and treasure your guidance.

This morning we pray for those who might feel far away from your wisdom, for those who are lost and hurting, for those who feel alone and perhaps scared. Lord God, make us ambassadors of your good news, ready to proclaim the truths of your gospel, both in Word and in deed.

Gather us now as a community of faithful believers, ones who encourage and support each other through the joys and the hardships of life. Bind us together as one body, as we recite the words that you taught us to pray, saying 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.

**Peggy McKinley and Cindy Jones sing "*I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*"**  
**Accompanied by Kimberly Swan**

**Brendan Ashley -- Charge and Benediction**

Please join me in this week's charge and benediction. Go this week in the power of the Holy Spirit, listening for the wisdom of God, as you go out into work, into life, with your family, friends, and even with those people that we call strangers.

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