

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Sunday, August 8, 2021

The Book of Proverbs

“Proverbs: Planning and Trusting”

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell

Rev. Ashley S. Ashley — Welcome and Announcements

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the worship of God today! This is the online worship service for Sunday, August 8th. I'm Pastor Ashley and I am just so glad that you have chosen to be with us today!

I am joined in worship today by Pastor Mark Hovermale and our children's ministry director Darlene Maginley. Bekah Brudi is here this week to provide our music. I'm really excited to share with you all that this week our head of staff, our senior minister, Pastor Emily is back with us and she will be providing our sermon later on in the service. I know we've all been praying for her, as she has been away these last two months on her extended vacation and study leave. It is so good to welcome her back today and I know we're all looking forward to hearing from her a little bit later.

I have just a couple of announcements to share with you all before we get started with our worship service today. First, this is for all the men. I'd like to share with you all about our retired men's breakfast which is taking place on Tuesday, August 10th, at 7:30 a. m. , at Zach's Restaurant on Main Street in Plymouth. All men are welcome. Bring a friend! Everyone is welcome to join in this time of fellowship.

The second announcement I have for you today is about our Thursday evening prayer group, which will continue in August. These prayer groups meet over Zoom at 8:30 p. m. on the first three Thursdays of each month. So, 1,2,3 -- the first three Thursdays of each month for evening devotions and prayer. Check out the bulletin for the Zoom link if you would like to join us this week on Thursday, August 12th, or the following week on Thursday, August 19th.

Finally, I have a third announcement. Really, this is just an announcement to draw your attention to the bulletin. Not only is there fabulous information on all kinds of announcements and ongoings of the church, but right now, in this moment, there are a couple of really neat articles about mission opportunities, of people in our congregation who are answering God's call to serve others. For example, there's a story, that's really worth looking into, featuring one of our youngest members who turned her Art in the Park project in July into an opportunity to raise money for one girl in Malawi to have a scholarship.

There's also an article about a recent service opportunity at Hope Clinic in Ypsilanti.

Finally, you can read a synopsis of Rocky Railway, our 2021 Vacation Bible School, and learn about how we came to know how to trust Jesus! Just ask the kids about that one! I'm sure they'll have you doing the arm motion correctly; they had to teach me. Again, read about the ways that we're serving God in this community this summer. As we prepare for

the fall, I'm sure more mission opportunities will be presented to us. The bulletin, again, is always chock full of important information.

Rev. Ashley – Opening Prayer

Friends, now in this moment, as we gather together in this space, in your home, I want to invite you into a time of prayer, invite you into a time when we can worship God together. Let us pray together.

Gracious and loving God, we come to worship today because we are in awe of your goodness and all of the ways that you love us and all of the ways that you reach out to us, even when we turn away. Lord, we know that there have been times this week when we have ignored your voice, when we could have loved you or ourselves or our neighbor better, when we should have held on to your wisdom, instead of relying on our own. We come to worship today to confess these sins and others before you and before one another. We come to worship today because we know that we need you in our lives. We ask for your forgiveness and mercy, and we ask for your love and your presence. Lord, we know that you welcome all who seek your face, all who humble themselves and all who hold fast to your Word. We come to worship today, excited for what you might have in store for us. May we be transformed, filled with your Spirit, and sent back out into the world as your faithful disciples. Amen.

Bekah Brudi plays guitar and sings “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

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

Good morning, kids! Do you know what is meant by “trust fall”? If you never heard of it, it takes two people; one stands behind the other. Now the person in back has to brace themselves and put their arms out to catch the person in front. It sounds hard, but that's actually the easier of the two jobs, because the person in front has to cross their arms over their chest, close their eyes and fall backwards. They really have to trust that person behind them. If you're the person in the back and something goes wrong, you say, “Oops!”, and move on. But if you're in the person in front and something goes wrong, you get hurt!

Now as an example of this, I asked my daughter if she would come today and let me catch her while doing a trust fall. She didn't trust me to catch her, and she wouldn't come. It takes a lot to do this, to trust the person behind you!

Two weeks ago, in vacation Bible school, we learned the good news that we can *always* trust Jesus. We learned that in hard times Jesus will pull us through. We learned that Jesus' power lets us live forever. He helps us to be good friends, he helps us to be bold. We learned that we can *always* trust Jesus.

Now, for some of the ways that we can trust Him: We know that there is never anything that we can do that will make Jesus stop loving us. We can always trust his love. We know that when we do something wrong and ask for forgiveness, that Jesus will always forgive us. We can trust his forgiveness. We know that if we believe in Jesus, he has a place in heaven for us someday. We can trust that we have a place in heaven.

So in today's Bible lesson, our Bible verses talk about trusting Jesus. We know that even though some tough things happen here on earth, that we can always trust Him to forgive us, to love us, and to have a place for us in heaven forever. Even if it might be pretty hard to fall back into the arms of a person behind us, it's never hard to fall back into the arms of Jesus!

Let's say a prayer together. Dear Father, thank you for giving us so many things that we can trust. We can trust your love and your power and your grace and your forgiveness. Help us to rest in that trust and to know that your arms are always waiting to catch us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Trust Jesus! !

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Scripture Reading

All of our scripture passages today come from the book of Proverbs, chapter 16.

Proverbs 16:1-3

¹ To humans belong the plans of the heart,
but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue.

² All a person's ways seem pure to them,
but motives are weighed by the LORD.

³ Commit to the LORD whatever you do,
and he will establish your plans.

Proverbs 16:9

⁹ In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the LORD establishes their steps.

Proverbs 16:16-18

¹⁶ How much better to get wisdom than gold,
to get insight rather than silver!

¹⁷ The highway of the upright avoids evil;
those who guard their ways preserve their lives.

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:20

²⁰ Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers,
and blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.

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

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Sermon: “Planning and Trusting” (About Godly Wisdom)

Dear friends, it's great to be back, and I am so grateful to you for the recent time I have had away. I want to take this moment before we launch into the prayer before our sermon, to say thank you, thank you to the church for this time away. It's been a great time of rest and

time to reconnect with my family, a time of both study and prayer. I want to make a special point this morning of thanking Mark and Ashley and our entire church staff for leading the church so ably in my absence over these last two months. I also want to thank the Session and the Deacons and our talented and dedicated Building and Grounds Committee for all that they have done in the past two months to prepare our church so beautifully for the future.

Thank you, as well, to the incredible generosity of everyone who gave to our Refresh, Renew and Return campaign. We launched that campaign literally the week I was leaving on my break, and I left it in the capable hands of everybody else. They did such an outstanding job! Thanks to your generosity, as a church we raised close to \$100,000 to refresh all the worship spaces within our church which were looking tired and very much needed a facelift. Thank you for making this church such an inviting place by renewing these worship spaces. I look forward to being with you in person in these worship spaces in the days and weeks to come. Now, friends, I did wonder though—being that the campaign went so well in my absence, maybe I should go away more often! I think that's a question that can only be answered with Godly wisdom!

Thanks be to God that today that's our subject--Godly wisdom. How do we understand God's plans for our lives and how do we trust in those plans? The very best way for us to discern that is by first turning to God in prayer. Would you all please join me as we pray now to God. Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the wisdom that you offer to each and every single one of us. We pray that you would open our hearts, our minds, and our lives to receive your teaching today. May your wisdom help us to become the people that you desire us to be. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends, this morning I have a bit of a confession to make. It has not been until very recently that I have become a fan of the book of Proverbs. You may realize that never before, here in our church, at least during my time as a minister here, have we preached on this particular book of wisdom. That is because I have always found this book really difficult to understand. Every time I would read the book of Proverbs I would find the words going in one ear and quickly out the other. I find the teaching within each chapter to be random. There doesn't seem to be a logical method to the way that the teaching is laid out. Although I am not an engineer, I *am* Presbyterian and I do like things done to a certain degree, decently and in order! The fact that there has seemed to be no order in this Old Testament book has been a little bit of a puzzle to drive me crazy.

Well, let me just say how grateful I am today and over the past several weeks to have benefited from listening to Ashley and Mark and Brendan Ashley, as well as Darlene through her amazing children's sermons, bring the book of Proverbs to life. It has helped me, and I hope helped you as well, gain a deeper understanding of what this book has to say to us today. By digging deeper into the study, first through the teaching of my able colleagues, but secondly through my own personal study of Proverbs, I have learned a few important things that I want to share with you today.

First, as author and pastor Tim Keller writes in the opening of his devotional book on Proverbs, "The Proverbs are given to us to act as the smelling salts of the Bible. The short sayings are there to startle us into alertness." Now this book is packed with memorable phrases to help us think quickly about issues in new and insightful ways. For example, in Proverbs, chapter 16, there is a verse that Mark did not read to us because it seemed not

to be fitting with the rest of the scripture text, but it's a memorable verse and we would be remiss not to highlight it. In verse 31 of chapter 16 it says:

³¹ Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.

Please, can someone this morning give me an “Amen!” “Gray hair is a crown of splendor.” Not everyone in this life lives long enough to receive gray hair and so, by that fact alone, we know that it is a gift. But gray hair is also often well-earned, although I personally wage war against my own gray hair. I can tell you as they start to come in, I've decided to start naming each hair. So I have one named Doug, and I have another one named Sarah, and I have another one named Hannah. You can see where I'm going with this!

Our gray hair is often a testimony to our love and hard work, and it will one day be a crown of beauty, a story of love and witness on our heads. Now through my study of the book of Proverbs I've also learned that a great deal of the teaching which I originally believed to be random and confusing in its order has been given to us to encourage us to dig deeper in our faith. In other words, the teaching is deliberately presented to us in a slapdash manner because we are called to do the hard work of piecing the puzzle together.

There is Godly guidance and truth to be discovered here, but we must first wrestle with the teaching, because some of the teachings of Proverbs seem to contradict one another. Yet if we want the full picture of what the writer of Proverbs is trying to tell us about any particular subject, then we need to look at the teaching as a whole. Now I'm going to go very old school here. I want you to imagine before you a bulletin board. Now if there are kids here and they don't know what bulletin boards are, they are things you pin pictures or words to.

As you read through the book of Proverbs I would encourage you, in your mind, to pin on the bulletin board all the teaching you can find on one particular topic. It's up to you to gather it from its various places, to do the hard work. Biblical scholars tell us that we should never take one single proverb as the definitive teaching on any subject. They must be held up against each other to gain wisdom about the subject as a whole.

Today we're turning our attention specifically to the topic of planning our lives and trusting God with our lives. Now remember some of these teachings that we find in the book of Proverbs are given to us as smelling salts; they are to startle us into alertness. So even on this topic, trusting in God and planning our lives before God, there are certain proverbs that will startle us, such as Proverbs, chapter 16, verse 9, which says:

⁹ In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.

Now right off the bat we find confusion. Who ultimately is in charge of our lives? It sounds like humanity proposes plans and God disposes the plans. Are we calling the shots or ultimately is God? Remember, within this Old Testament book we are told to look at the teaching of any particular subject against other teachings about that same subject. So on the same subject, Proverbs, chapter 16, at verse 3, says:

³ Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.

Proverbs, chapter 3, at verses 5 and 6, says:

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.

Let me ask you, after hearing all this teaching, are we making plans concerning our future and then praying that God blesses those plans, or are we waiting on God to reveal His plans? We wait and we pray for the faith and wisdom to follow those plans, we wrestle with our understanding on this topic because we wrestle with the teaching. In my wrestling with this particular text, or all the texts on this matter, it has led me to three insights which I believe have been helpful to my overall walk of faith and my own understanding of God. In Proverbs chapter 16, at verse 20:

²⁰ Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers and blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.

In this text, the book speaks more about *whom* God guides. God is more interested in *who* is listening to him, then *how* God is guiding us, God guides those, it says in Proverbs chapter 16, at verse 20, who give heed to his instruction.

In other words God guides anyone who is willing to listen and to seek his good counsel. We are called to be among those who listen, and we are told that if we listen we are blessed as those who place our trust in God. But so often as Christians we get ourselves all worked up wondering why God isn't providing more direction for our lives. We wait for signs. We pray for directions as to where we are to go next, and we wonder why God doesn't answer our prayers immediately for guidance or help or direction.

As Tim Keller writes in his devotional, the plans of the heart belong to us; they are our responsibility. The way that God controls history never forces us to act, yet every one of our steps is part of God's plan. The truth, then, the paradox, is incredibly hard for us to grasp. Essentially every detail of human history can be under God's control and yet every human action is free and responsible. This gives us enormous incentive as Christians to initiate our own choices. We do not need to "wait around" for God to open the door. We can open the door, but as Proverbs points out poor choices still can lead to trouble and pain. Even if that is the case and even if we are to fail at something, God can take our pain and our failure and weave it into something that is marked by grace.

God's plans for our lives remain because we forever remain in God's hands. Ultimately, God is more concerned *who* we are becoming through our choices. Are we becoming more God-like or are we moving further away from God? God wants us to become more and more Christlike. There's freedom in this understanding. We're no longer paralyzed, feeling we are unable to move forward in life, because God hasn't provided us with clear direction. But when it comes to planning our future and making big decisions we also need to be careful.

We must not expect God to act like God works for us! Let me explain that in a different way. Way back at the beginning of June when my break began, my husband was very excited all of a sudden about all the free time I was going to be having. One day he came in and very excitedly presented me with a "honey-do" list which was a list of everything in the house we had never gotten to that now I would have all kinds of time to do and to address. I have to say in my first week off, I was not quite in the appropriate mental space to receive such a lengthy list. I may have been a bit snarky when I responded to my husband, "Honey, I am not your employee!" Yet this sentiment, "Honey, I am not your employee," is sometimes what I think God wants to say to *us*!

How many times have I, or have you, prayed, asking God to bless our plans. We ask God to do our bidding and we commit our plans to God, as it says in verse 3 of Proverbs 16.

But this does not mean that it is God's business or job responsibility to bring our plans and our desires and our hopes to fruition! It is not even God's job to bless our plans. God's role is *not* to do our bidding and certainly God is not our employee!

On the flip side of this argument, we are also wrong to think we can make our plans *without* God. Proverbs chapter 16, at verse 18 says this:

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Now this actually may be one of the proverbs you already know, because this is where we get that great saying, "Pride goes before a fall." It comes from chapter 16 of the book of Proverbs and although it's not directly in those words, the sentiment remains the same. We are in danger of a fall if our pride leads us to believe that we should venture forth in life without God and without including God within our lives. What God would love from us more than anything else is for us to unconditionally trust him and obey him in each and every area of our lives. As we do this, the proverbs tell us that we will gain wisdom. This wisdom is not achieved quickly. It is a quest that will take our entire lives and it is, let me tell you, a quest.

Darlene, I know, has spoken about this in past children's sermons, where she's talked about the hunt, the treasure hunt, for wisdom. Certainly, that is an idea that's repeated throughout this Godly book, that we have to dig deep, we have to seek out God's wisdom because it is not always clear. Yet God wants to, and desires, to speak to us. God desires to speak to us about how we should live our lives and about the people we are becoming. It is our hope and our challenge to live our lives increasingly open to God's Spirit at work within us.

Friends, God *does* have plans for our lives. God desires to accompany us throughout the whole of our lives and God will shower our lives with grace, but in ways that we cannot expect, in ways that we may be surprised, in ways that we never knew we needed. Yet the one thing that is clear is that God is faithful and God will not let go of us and God will not let go of taking our plans and, somehow in his grace, making them beautiful, even as we grow closer to him.

Thanks be to God for his ongoing gift of wisdom, for his guidance and grace, this day and forever more. Amen.

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

Would you all please pray with me. Holy God, you are wisdom, you are love, you are grace and peace. Thank you for filling our lives with all these good things. Thank you for filling our lives with your presence given so generously through your Son, through your Word and Spirit. Continually teach us, dear God, what it means to open our hearts and our lives to your wisdom. Help us to lean deeply into your holy presence through every experience of joy and challenge.

We lift up our world and continue to pray for its healing. We ask specifically for ongoing healing and protection from the virus. We pray as well for healing from sin that separates us from one another and separates us from you. We thank you for showing us through your life the blessing of reconciliation.

We lift up and pray today for our adult mission team serving this week in Mexico. Bless them with the strength of your Spirit. Bless them, we pray, with traveling mercies, with

health and safety. May they powerfully share your love as they serve in your name. Bless especially Jim and Susie Drake and all the children who reside at Colina de Luz. We pray today for all individuals who are in need. We pray for comfort for everyone who grieves, for healing for all who are sick, help and hope for all who are worried about the future. Help us to offer the light and grace of your presence to everyone with whom we have contact.

We love you, Lord, and pray that you would strengthen us as we seek to live lives that reflect your grace and peace. Please receive our prayers this day. We ask 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.

Bekah Brudi plays guitar and sings *“Give Me Faith”*

Rev. Campbell – Benediction and Blessing

Friends, as we go from here today, may the blessing of Christ, the wisdom of God and the power and the peace of the Holy Spirit be yours today, and always. Amen.