**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**August 15th, 2021**

**Words of Wisdom**

1. Crash Course in Proverbs

This morning, the text we are focusing upon comes from the book of Proverbs, which is not a

book we often look at or often have a lot of context to understand. So, I need to get a bit nerdy and give you some background before we can get into the real meat of the text.

There are eight sections or collections of texts within this book. The reason the text is broken up in this way is that each section has a particular theme, writer, and audience. This morning, our text, which comes from Proverbs 9, fits in the first collection which fits under the Proverbs of Solomon, Son of David, King of Israel. From Proverbs 1-7, there are instructions coming from this idea of Wisdom.

Who or what is Wisdom anyway, at least in this context? Wisdom, in Hebrew, is Sophia, and it is very clear throughout the book that Wisdom is a woman, something or someone of a feminine nature that guides and encourages people in their journey. At this particular point in time, there are two theologies that are going around after the rebuilding of the temple – one was that the best wisdom was opposing the wicked and the other was that wisdom was maintaining one’s identity. Wisdom comes in though and says – wait, hold on, there’s another way. She says that the world is unpredictable – sometimes the righteous prosper, sometimes the wicked do. Wisdom isn’t a black and white idea but it is a way to interpret the world’s tensions and differences that are often changing and moving through time and space.

1. Wake up.

For those of you who snoozed through the first part of explanation there, this is my friendly

reminder to lovingly wake up because we now have to hear this statement and following question: Cool. Wisdom is a woman and she teaches us that the world is ever-changing and transforming and how we employ wisdom in the world will look different in other contexts and places. So...what does that mean for us today?

Good question. There’s traditional Biblical wisdom that you can find, in fact, there are seven pillars of wisdom that you can find in Proverbs. But let’s think generally of Biblical times and the wisdom that might be handed down.

Back in the Biblical days, it would have been wisdom to have many wives in order to increase the population of believers and partially for survival. I’m guessing if you asked your spouse about this wisdom today, they would not be on board. Women, you are to be subservient to your husband and your husband to you – how are you feeling about that idea in extreme? Or maybe, later in the New Testament, you are told to break contact with your family and leave it all behind to follow Jesus? It’s not that it doesn’t happen today, but the wisdom and expectation, at least in the predominant Western world has changed.

Now let’s go 50 to 100 years back in time from now. Women, you can’t vote or really express your ideas. Men, you are expected to be the providers. Being on the LGBT spectrum was not even a topic to be discussed. Children, if you do not behave, there might be a ruler coming straight to your behind. Now, some of this still happens in a limited fashion today, but life has changed.

And life will continue to change. Wisdom promises that – wisdom is a matter of making faithful decisions and discernments in a world where there are no absolutes. In some ways, that’s terrifying, in other ways, it is liberating. And the world really does continue to change not only from decade to decade, but day by day things are shifting, decisions need to be made, and sometimes we make wise choices and sometimes we do not.

We are also living in a world where fast-paced wisdom is a necessity in the Western world, which can be exhausting. The facebook alert pops up, your friend says something that is moral bigotry – do you keep scrolling or respond to the post? Your child sends you a text – hey, can I sleep over a x person’s house tonight? – and as the ellipses show up in your phone, you feel torn on how to make a smart decision. Your friends are heading out the door to go on a last minute trip – do you join the fun spontaneously or do you consider the responsibilities of home?

In any of those modern day examples, there is no cut or dry wisdom. There are variables, there are considerations, and in today’s world, you are trying to seek out wisdom in a flash of a second.

1. Wise Choices

So what I’m really dwelling on at the moment is this sense that wisdom is given from God,

so how do we tune into that wisdom? One of the best and most memorable classes I took in college was a class called ‘Moral Contemporary Issues’ and I remember sitting down and reading articles from a variety of sides of major issues such as abortion or euthanasia. In that research and the papers I would write for the class, my eyes were opened in a different way than before I took the class. It was not necessarily that I changed my mind on any of the particular issues, but it was valuable to take the time to sit down and to unfurl some of my assumptions I made throughout my life.

When I was living in Europe, another helpful group that I think is coming to prominence in the USA is this idea called ‘The Human Library’ and the tagline for this project is ‘Unjudge someone.’ It is still a fairly new program, created in 2000 in Copenhagen, Denmark. There are folks who volunteer to be part of the library who will come from all different experiences, from having bi-polar or schizophrenia, or someone who use to rely on drugs, or a transgender individual and when you enter the library, you get the chance for 7-10 minutes to sit down across from someone with this experience and respectfully you get to open their book, as them questions that you might think were taboo, and you learn more about the human condition.

1. Foundations

It seems that if the world is spinning at a fast pace and we need to make vital decisions, that we need to first set a foundation. We need to have these experiences where we have difficult conversations about difficult topics, we need to open and stretch our minds, and be willing to agree to disagree but do so lovingly. Yet before you even get to that step, your foundation needs to be a relationship with God, so that God can join you on the journey of those difficult questions and be a guiding light of wisdom that is already intact when things get difficult.

As we do this, we come back to the heart of what was shared in our Proverbs reading today – lay aside immaturity, lay aside your preconceptions, and live, and walk in the way of insight. Wisdom is inviting you to come, sit, and to learn – and Wisdom, as part of God’s energy, is doing the very same. Come, sit, learn, explore, venture, try something new, remember the ways of old.

We are facing days, my friends, where need to make decisions quickly, and through a foundational relationship with God, the wisdom will come in our changing world. The hard truth is that you and I are human – we follow God, but we will make wise choices and sometimes we will not. So, may we be strengthened as we cement the foundation, as we align ourselves with God’s love, and may we seek to make wise decisions guided by the God of all times and all places. Amen.