

June 10, 2018
Proverbs 2:1-11
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
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Wisdom

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

The book of Proverbs contains “words of the wise” to be shared with the young. In certain parts of the book, Wisdom is personified as a female character, who was created by God in the beginning (8:22) and who continues to offer wisdom to those who will listen. Let us listen to the wisdom being offered.

SERMON

Wisdom is hard to define. It’s one of those things that you know it when you see it and maybe even more we notice when it’s absent. It is not confined to any one age. “Out of the mouths of babes” reminds us that Wisdom may come to us through the young.

Wisdom is something we can cultivate but ultimately it is a gift of God to which we need to be attentive. As we heard

God gives wisdom...

(which) will come into your heart.

One way we cultivate wisdom is to learn from the past. It is one of the reasons we study the Bible and secular history. We listen to and dialogue with the people who have come before us. We are encouraged by their wisdom and we are warned by the error of their ways. It is much easier in retrospect to see how people justify their cultural patterns as correct, even when they are clearly unwise and unjust.

Today I want to talk about the disconnection between wisdom and shame.

This week two celebrities died by their own hands – Kate Spade (a fashion designer) and Anthony Bourdain (a food explorer). Many of us are familiar with suicide in a much more up close and personal way – through loved ones, friends, fellow veterans, classmates, students, co-workers. Thirty-five years ago, one of my high school students ended his life with a gun. I’m still stunned at how poorly we adults handled the situation. Basically, we said nothing, which only added to the sense of shame for his friends and family.

Just this week we have seen expressions of shame directed toward Kate and Anthony after their deaths. This is unjust, unkind, and un-humble. We shame others because we are afraid and are seeking to keep them at arm’s distance, to keep ourselves safe from being tainted by whatever they have. Not that long ago, cancer was considered a shameful condition.

One of the things I’ve learned over the years is that people who are feeling suicidal just want the pain to stop – the pain of depression, the pain of anxiety, the pain of post-traumatic stress, the pain of shame. Shame is a powerfully destructive force that can end people’s lives.

Wisdom, on the other hand, calls us to move deeper into compassion in the face of someone else's pain and suffering. To listen carefully to the source of their pain and to help them find support. If you or someone who know needs help, ask for it and keep asking until you get it.

We have someone in our congregation who has been helping us learn from the wisdom and the mistakes of the past by being our church historian/archivist. Mildred Jones has been about this ministry in our midst for twenty-eight years. She first answered a request from the pastor to write some history articles and has stayed with it all these years. We are grateful.

In the display cases are some of Mildred's favorite articles from our archives. There is a copy of Uncle Tom's cabin, a bible from the 1700s, baby shoes from Little Georgie Adams.

A couple of months ago we received a letter from the Congregational Library and Archives in Boston, which says:

This letter is a long overdue update on New England's Hidden Histories, and especially First Parish's Part of that remarkable collection. As you know your 18th century records have been digitized and made available on our website...I hope you'll pass this note along to Mildred Jones, who did so much to make this happen...It's been a true privilege to help bring your story to the wider world.

So, Mildred, here is the letter and a card and gift from the congregation. We thank you for everything.