

Cadbury Pastorate Service
19 September 2021

Call to Worship Psalm 23 in Psalms Redux (by Carla Grosch-Miller)

This I know: My life is in Your hands. I have nothing to fear. I stop, breathe, listen. Beneath the whirl of what is is a deep down quiet place. You beckon me to tarry there. This is the place where unnamed hungers are fed, the place of clear water, refreshment. My senses stilled, I drink deeply, at home in timeless territory. In peril, I remember: Death's dark vale holds no menace. I lean into You; Your eternal presence comforts me. I am held tenderly. In the midst of all that troubles, that threatens and diminishes, You set abundance before me. You lift my head; my vision clears. The blessing cup overflows. This I know: You are my home and my hope, my strength and my solace, and so shall You ever be.

Hymn 95 God is love

Prayer

You – greater than all we can think of, smaller than all we can imagine. You – farther than the universe and beyond, nearer than the secrets of our hearts. You – breath of being, before us and behind us. You – force of life above us and beneath us. You – speaking in many different tongues, whispering in the depths of our souls. We come into your presence to praise you because you are and we are through you and together with you, now and forever. Amen.

Silence

Lord, teach us the silence of humility/The silence of wisdom/The silence of love/The silence that speaks without words/The silence of faith.

Lord, teach us to silence our own hearts and minds, that we may listen to the movement of your Spirit, and feel your presence.....

Scripture Reading Proverbs 9: 1-6 & James 3:13 -4:3, 7-8a

Reflection

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.”

What is wisdom? First of all, it is not the same as knowledge. For, if knowledge is learned facts, wisdom is the experience of living with those

facts, learning how they apply them to life, discerning their relevance in life. Knowledge does not necessarily have anything to do with living in relationship and living a compassionate life. However, wisdom, at least biblically, is almost always related to spiritual insight and to gifts such as mercy, kindness, humility and love. Wisdom understands that life is complex and cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts. Whereas knowledge is sometimes confused by this difference, believing that if we could only identify each component of life, then we would be able to define the whole. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way: *To understand reality is not the same as to know about outward events. It is to perceive the essential nature of things. The best-informed man is not necessarily the wisest... To recognize the significant in the factual is wisdom.*

So, wisdom is insight, we read in the book of Proverbs. And wisdom also includes humility. This is how part of the reading in the letter of James is translated in The Message: *Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom—it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats.*

Wisdom understands the limits of knowledge. And, in understanding the limits of knowledge, wisdom humbly embraces uncertainty. The uncertainty that is inherent in our complex world and in all life, though we are not always very comfortable with it. We like life to be predictable; we like the world to be neatly categorized in a dualistic either/or. Good/bad, true/false, right/wrong, light/dark, black/white, saved/lost etc. It means that we can take a position and see the world from *our* point of view without having to recognize that there are other points of view that may be equally valid. But actually, these neat categorizations do not work. According to Rob Bell, *We are way too complex, and so is the world—too much surprise, too many possibilities, too much that defies our limited logical categories...* And this applies to the way we speak about God too. *An image of God doesn't contain God, in the same way a word about God or a doctrine or a dogma about God isn't God; it only points to God.* Bell goes on to say: *Whatever we say about God always rests within the larger mystery of what we can't*

say; meaning always resides within a larger mystery; knowing always takes place within unknowing; whatever has been revealed to us surrounded by that which hasn't been revealed to us. In other words, the world is both more complicated and complex and ultimately interconnected than at first meets our eyes. Sadly, it is the lenses through which we choose to see the world that make it appear that we are often at odds, even in opposition to one another. Because our world is so complex, life is so rich and beautiful in its diversity, as well as amazingly interconnected it is perhaps not surprising that people may feel overwhelmed and seek some kind of anchorage in simple dualistic and/or thinking. Yes, that may be well why we so often try to tame, control, define, and dogmatize.....all to give us a sense of certainty, security, of making sense of it all.

But what if we could open ourselves to the possibility that those with a different point of view, different knowledge or “wisdom” could be right too, which does not necessarily mean that we are wrong. It means that there may be more than one way to solve any problems or understand any issue that we are faced with. And this is so important at this time when we are faced with global problems that need a response from people from many different nations and cultures and ages who all bring different perspectives. There is an openness, a humility, a wisdom, even a loving kindness and compassion when we look at life not with the perspective of either/or but rather the perspective of and/and, and that is so important at this time.

If you have not read it yet, do try to read Marilynne Robinson's book *Gilead*, in which John Ames, an elderly congregational minister writes a memoir of his life for his young son. Ames is a man of wisdom and with a deep spirituality, who with humility and grace accepts the inherent and unavoidable uncertainty in life (which he has experienced himself). He also explains how as a preacher he grappled with it. *See and see but do not perceive, hear and hear but do not understand, as the Lord says. I can't claim to understand that saying, as many times as I've heard it, and even preached on it. It simply states a deeply mysterious fact. You can know a thing to death and be for all purposes completely ignorant of it.* And it is clear that while Ames has his own views, he respects the views of others and he reckons that it is impossible for any individual to judge a matter without hearing the different as well as complementary perspectives.

Too often we lack humility and think that once we “know” something or someone we do not need to consider another perspective, another

explanation, another assessment.....because we know and know best! But does this not continuously lead to conflict and division? *“Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from?”* James asks. In our families, at work, in politics, in our knowledge of the world and how it operates, it is a wisdom of living good lives, of humility, of peace, full of mercy that James commends rather than the self-righteous, boastful, unyielding and prejudiced attitudes much too prevalent in society and the church. For James the “wisdom from above” is also relational rather than individual. It is a wisdom that works for the common good, a wisdom that expresses itself in everyday life. It is the *wisdom from above* that met with *the wisdom from below* in the life of Jesus, so that we all could see which is which.....yes, which is which! Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn 321 Your words to me are life and health

Prayers of Intercession & Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, rejoicing in your blessings, trusting in your loving care for all, we bring you our prayers for the world.....for our country.....for the church.....for people in need.....for those in the circle of friendship and love around us.....and for ourselves.....

And we pray together, Our Father.....

Offertory

Gracious and loving God, we dedicate to you our thoughts, our words, our gifts, our deeds, the working of our hands, the thinking of our minds, the loving of our hearts. In the name and in the spirit of Jesus, we offer our gifts to you and ask your blessing upon them. Amen.

Hymn 531 Lord of all hopefulness

Blessing

Go out into the world in peace. Have courage. Hold onto what is good. Return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honour all people. Honour all creation. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the power and communion of the Spirit be with us all. Amen.