



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Pentecost 16**  
**Proper 19 (B)**  
**September 12, 2021**

**RCL: Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 19; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38**

### **Proverbs 1:20-33**

The Book of Proverbs is part of the wisdom literature in the Hebrew Scriptures. An important aspect of this literature is to guide the people of God in ways of right living. In this passage from early in the first chapter, Wisdom is personified and moves amid the bustling activity in the core of the city. She calls out with a focus on those who are not following God's wisdom. She warns them of the calamity that befalls those who do not listen and root their lives in the fear of God—the following of and reverence for God. She warns that disaster looms for those who go their own way based on their own knowledge. She bluntly calls them fools.

This passage draws a stark distinction between the outcomes for those who listen to and follow God's ways and those who do not. She calls out to us in all the daily busyness of our lives to listen and follow God's wisdom by painting a vivid picture of what happens for those who do not. It's a disquieting passage that invites us to reflect on where we root the actions of our lives.

- How are God's knowledge and wisdom different from learning not grounded in God?
- Given the difficulties and challenges everyone faces in life, what might it mean to live at ease, without dread of disaster, by following God's Wisdom?

### **Psalm 19**

Psalm 19 is a beautiful response to today's lesson from Proverbs. Where do we listen for God's knowledge and words that Wisdom so longs for us to attend? Psalm 19 holds before us two places where knowledge of God can be encountered: creation and the law, the scripture. We hear of creation wordlessly singing of God's glory, carrying a message for all the world. We also hear of the beauty and clarity of attending to God's word in scripture, allowing deep meditation on the words to help align our lives with God's wishes for us.

- Where do you most easily hear God's wisdom?
- What experience have you had of the words of scripture reviving your soul?
- How have you heard creation singing God's glory? What has that meant for you in your life?

### **James 3:1-12**

This lesson from James marks about the halfway point in the letter. It continues one of the main themes in James: how our actions should reflect our faith. This portion of the epistle turns to a sometimes less obvious aspect of our actions—how we use our words.

The epistle writer raises a paradox. The tongue we use to praise God is the same tongue that is often used to cause harm to others. We are challenged to consider that this paradox should not exist—for how can fresh and brackish water come from the same place? How can words denigrating other people of God come from a tongue that professes faith in Christ Jesus? The damage done by sharp tearing words can be the small flame that grows into a large fire. The dignity of every human being is at stake. Do we build up or do we tear down? This passage from James asks us to question how we use our words and how they reflect our discipleship.

- In today's world, how are words used to praise? How are they used to curse others? What are some concrete examples of the paradox that James presents to us?
- How does this lesson challenge you to use your words in a way that reflects your faith?

### **Mark 8:27-38**

The gospel writer makes an important turn in this passage from Mark. For the first time, Jesus begins to teach the disciples about his suffering, death, and resurrection. He is nearing the time when he will start the journey toward Jerusalem. At this moment, he raises an important question with them: How do you understand who I am? With confidence, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. Then Jesus begins to teach them what is in store for the Son of Man. This provokes Peter to rebuke him. Responding, Jesus rebukes Peter so severely that he calls him Satan. Peter both understood and didn't understand all; he knew that Jesus was the Messiah and didn't comprehend what that would mean. When Jesus began to teach them, it wasn't what Peter expected.

It is easy to think we understand. But we so often understand from our perspective as humans and not from the perspective of divine things. We can cling tightly to our ideas about what is happening. Jesus insists the disciples, Peter, and all of us let go of these things, and instead attend to the life of following Jesus, wherever that leads, even if it means unexpected directions, places where we might not otherwise choose to go.

- How can we learn whether we are following Jesus' way rather than simply human ways?
- Whom do we have to rebuke us when we need to grow in our understanding of divine things?

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