

Yr. C, Wednesday 1 of Lent: LEARN
March 13, 2019
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
769 Words

Lessons: Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21
Psalm 78:1-8
Matthew 9:9-13

Try to remember when you were learning something difficult for the first time. I'm not talking about memorizing facts. I'm talking about learning a new life skill—riding a bike without training wheels, swimming without a float, or diving without looking up to see the water.

After we turn to follow Jesus we must then learn what it means. And learning is not easy—which is why most people give up on it. Learning from the life and teachings of Jesus challenges our thinking. Learning from Jesus is like your first bicycle ride without training wheels. Learning from Jesus is like putting your face into the water before you can swim. Learning from Jesus is like resisting your instinct to look up as you are diving in.

Learning to follow Jesus is not about memorizing facts. Learning to follow Jesus is about developing a new life skill—with all of the risk, challenge, and fear that goes with trying something new and different. It feels risky to take your feet off the ground and balance on two wheels. It feels uncomfortable to put your face in the water if you don't have to. It is positively frightening not to look up as you dive in head first.

Learning these life skills requires a generous amount of trust. Learning to follow Jesus *also* requires a generous amount of trust.

Tonight's lesson from Proverbs introduced us to Sophia—Lady Wisdom. Before the earth was brought forth, She was part of God's creativity. And still, She calls out to us from the crossroads in our life. She calls out at the city gates for all to hear.

God's *Sophia* tells the truth. God's Wisdom is not twisted or crooked. She is *straight*-forward. Still, we have to trust Her. Is the fruit of Wisdom really better than gold...even fine gold? It takes a generous amount of trust for us to prefer God's justice and righteousness above our own personal fortune.

The Psalmist speaks to us like a prophet. We are called not only to hear and heed God's Wisdom, but also to teach it to our children so that they might put *their trust* in God. It is like learning a new life skill to put your trust in the way of God...in the way of Love. It feels risky, challenging, and frightening.

The easiest way to respond to the risk, the challenge, and the fear of Love is by complaining and criticizing other people. Just look at the Pharisees in tonight's Gospel lesson. They were unwilling to learn from Jesus, and so they complained about his lifestyle and criticized his followers.

Notice how Jesus responds. He is not defensive at all. He simply tells the Pharisees they must go and learn. Likewise, we must learn. After we turn and choose to follow Jesus, we must learn what it all means.

And what Jesus says that what it all means is this: God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Jesus quotes the Wisdom of God, spoken through the prophet, Hosea, where God says, "I desire (your) mercy, not (your) sacrifice."

The Way of Love remains as risky, challenging, and frightening today as it was thousands of years ago. It is not a set of facts we can memorize. It is a new life skill we must practice in order to learn. It takes a generous amount of trust to follow the way of Jesus.

The first step is turning to him. The second step is learning from him.

Whatever else you do this Lent, push yourself to learn something new from Jesus' life which challenges *your life*. Push yourself to learn something new from Jesus' teachings which challenges your favorite assumptions—about God...or about life...or about other people.

You must be willing to read the Gospels with an open mind. Trust me—it feels like putting your face into the water even though you don't have to.

You must be willing to reflect daily on Jesus' life and teachings as the personification of God's Wisdom. Trust me—it is much easier to complain and criticize other people.

You must be willing to trust the Wisdom of God—the preference that God has for mercy and love above *everything else*.

This *new life* skill is hard to trust. The Way of Love requires practice, failure, progress, setbacks, persistence, trust, risk, hope, and courage.

The 3rd verse of our hymn this evening sums up the way we can learn from Jesus' example:

“As thou didst hunger, bear, and thirst,
so teach us, gracious Lord;
to die to self, and chiefly live
by thy most holy word.”

Amen.