

First Presbyterian Church
May 13th
Rev. Catherine Oliver

I titled the sermon for today, "Momma's Sound Advice."

In appreciation for my mom,
whom I loved and adored.

And to all the women who have given sound motherly advice to me and so many of us
throughout all generations.

I dedicate this sermon to these wise women whose words echo in our hearts providing sound
advice for our journey together in this world.

Now I can't prove it, but I have a hunch that Psalm 1 was written by a very wise woman, who
loved God and wanted to be sure all of her family and community understood the importance
of making sound, helpful choices in their lives.

So as I read these words, I invite you to not just listen,
But meditate on their meaning for you.

Hear now these words from Scripture and hear momma's sound advice for you:

Psalm 1

1:1 Happy are those who **do not** follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners
tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;

1:2 but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on this law they meditate day and night.

1:3 They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and
their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

1:4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

1:5 Therefore the wicked will not be able to stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

1:6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
and the way of the wicked will perish.

And the ways of the wicked will perish!

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

Yes, thanks be to God!

Psalm 1 made the cut.

It is the opening act for all of the psalms, laying the ground work for all the psalms to follow. In only 6 verses this psalm provides a map in no uncertain terms of how people of faith are to live their lives.

It opens with a Jesus like beatitude, a sermon on the mount so to speak...

“ Blessed are those who choose to follow God, God’s ways, God’s realm, God’s kingdom. Instead of following ways that cause harm and are not of God”

According to Psalm 1, God’s ways are found in meditating on God’s instructions found in the Torah the first 5 books of the bible.

But this psalm expands the holy readings to include all of the writings.

We are to pray with and study the poems, songs, prayers, stories and the laws found in all of scripture that teach us about God’s nature, God’s wisdom.

These teachings instruct us how to love God and one another.

Yet this psalm presents not a moral but a theological conundrum.

It isn’t about whether or not we choose good or bad ways of living.

It’s not about obeying moral laws.

Rather it’s about our heart, our intention, our deepest desire, to follow God.

Do we choose to put God first and God’s love for humankind and all creation center and foremost in our life?

Because when we allow God to reign in our lives,

the goodness of God can flow like a stream beside us, so that we yield

Holy fruit in its season, and our leaves, our energy does not wither.

No matter where we are planted we must choose to do no harm first, to care for others as God cares for us.

Before I ever went to seminary I took several years to explore and deeply examine my life.

I was the Director of Christian Education serving a large 1,200 member Presbyterian church in central Florida.

My mom had died very suddenly and I was grieving, deeply. I was only 29.

Since her death I find mother’s day difficult. But I still take time to browse through the mother’s day card section and find a mother’s day card just for her.

Of course I don’t send it. I don’t have her new address and I’m sure that would postage would cost a fortune. But I feel her as we read it together.

After my mom died, I had so many questions for God. My church family was great support. But

I was searching for answers about life, and I really longed for answers from God.

I enrolled in a weekly Wednesday morning Bible Study, BSF, a very conservative bible study which taught me a lot about scripture. And also gave me great insight into how a lot of people understand scripture.

A close friend introduced me to her Rabbi.

Rabbi Rosenblum and we became friends. One day after talking for hours, literally, hours, Rabbi Rosenblum said Catherine, you ask so many questions. Are you sure that you're not a Jew?

I said, Rabbi, you give so many answers, are you sure that you are not Christian?

We both laughed, out loud!

He told me that I must go to seminary,

But first insisted that I study Hebrew and Judaism with his 6 month exploring Judaism class.

So I went to synagogue every Monday evening for 2 hours to study Hebrew and learn about Judaism.

I went to a conservative Christian bible study every Wednesday morning to learn more about scriptures.

And from my studies, I learned that it is far more helpful to let go of black and white, good vs bad, thinking which creates chaos.

Dr. Becky Bailey, professor of child development at the University of Central Florida, says there is no such thing as a bad person or a bad child, just hurting ones

She believes that children, that includes us, are all motivated to be connected to others.

We all seek to belong, and to be loved.

And yet, if our needs are not met we will attempt to control others through our behaviors.

Dr. Baily suggests that we should not think of behavior as good or bad,

Rather, we need to consider behavior in terms of what is helpful vs what is hurtful.

And that leads us back to this psalm.

How are we choosing to live our lives? How are we choosing to be helpful rather than hurtful in our community and with our family?

I had to google the word scoffing. b/c I was not sure I had it right.

But scoffing is an act of mocking, ridicule, making fun of someone, or pooh-poohing another

person.

But in essence to scorn a person is an attempt to make another person feel bad about themselves.

And according to our Psalm

God really doesn't like us to be scoffers. And I know momma's sound advice is telling us if you can't say something nice...don't say anything at all.

Rather, we are to be like trees planted by streams of water, which yield healthy and helpful fruit so that our leaves do not wither.

And when we are helpful, loving and kind, all that we offer, we prosper.

We have choices in our lives.

And for many of us it takes a long, long time for Momma's sound advice to sink in.

But today, we can start.

Today we have an opportunity to make a difference in someone else's life.

We can smile at a person as we walk down the street.

When we're in the express aisle at the grocery store, we can pay for the person buying basic food like beans, milk and bread behind us because they seem in need.

And it is mother's day. We can give a call to those who have given sound advice to us and thank them. Let them know how much we love them.

Life is short and...

God is good..

All the time...

Amen