

19 September 2021

Proverbs 31.10-31

¹⁰ A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. ¹¹ Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. ¹² She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

¹³ She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. ¹⁴ She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. ¹⁵ She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants.

¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. ¹⁸ She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹ In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

²⁰ She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. ²¹ When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. ²² She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

²³ Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies the merchants with sashes.

²⁵ She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

²⁶ She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. ²⁷ She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

²⁸ Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ²⁹ 'Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.' ³⁰ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. ³¹ Honour her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Psalm 1

¹ Blessed are they who have not walked in the counsel of the ungodly:
nor followed the way of sinners, nor taken their seat amongst the scornful.

² But their delight is in the law of the Lord:
and on that law will they ponder day and night.

³ They are like trees planted beside streams of water:
that yield their fruit in due season.

⁴ Their leaves also shall not wither:
and look, whatever they do, it shall prosper.

⁵ As for the ungodly, it is not so with them:
they are like the chaff which the wind scatters.

⁶ Therefore the ungodly shall not stand up at the judgement:
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

⁷ For the Lord cares for the way of the righteous:
but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

James 3.1-12

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Mark 9.30-37

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.'³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.'

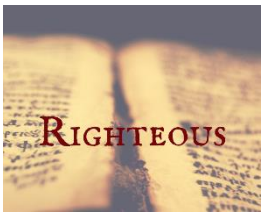
³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.'

Sentence

Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all. Mark 9.35

Prayer of the Day

God and Father of all,
you have taught us through your Son that the last shall be first,
and have made a little child the measure of your kingdom:
give us the wisdom from above,
so that we may understand that in your sight
the one who serves is the greatest of all.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



What an interesting array of readings we have today. At a broad stroke one could say that they are all about the way of the righteous but have slightly different slants on how that is lived. All our readings in the past few weeks have been on that theme. God is constantly calling us to live more righteously, to love him and our neighbour or to put it another way, to follow him. Each of these readings are like another facet of the diamond, just turning the truth a slightly different way so that we can see every aspect of it. Sometimes one facet just hits home or resonates with us sometimes the Lord uses a passage to put his finger on exactly what we need to hear: to comfort or confront. Today there is a slight emphasis on speech, having what we say line up with what the Lord would have us say.

Our reading from Proverbs gets a mixed reaction these days, perhaps the



gentlemen dream of finding a noble wife who will run the household perfectly, plus run several businesses on the side and support her husband in his search for respectability. Gentlemen, I hope you also notice that she is supplied with a household of servants.



The ladies among us feel tired just reading that list and perhaps just a little condemned before we even think of emulating her. Truthfully, I don't think such a woman existed even in ancient times, or only in King Solomon's dreams. She is quite a superwoman, isn't she? I certainly do not measure up.

However, there are a few things worth noting, she is certainly not a suppressed housewife, he has full confidence in her and does not tell her how to run the household or prevent her from going out and investing in whatever she thinks is worthwhile. This is a very liberated woman and makes her own decisions including looking after the poor and needy.

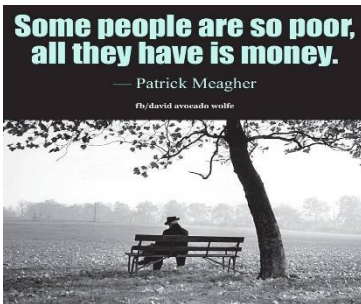


She is a righteous woman and fears the lord, and therefore she is honoured by her family, her husband and her community. This is one facet of righteousness.

Those things we can all emulate; we each do the work the Lord gives us to do and honour and encourage those around us in their work and faith. A word in season can often make a huge difference in someone's day.



Psalm 1 says that because the righteous have delighted in God's word (the word translated as 'law' meant God's word: scripture and revelation) they will produce fruit in due season and stand up at the judgement. There is a contrast here, the ungodly are sinful and scornful but the righteous read and think about what God is saying and apply it to their own lives. The righteous do not even listen to the counsel of the ungodly. Here is another facet of righteousness: the righteous are constantly listening to God and changing their lives so that they become more closely aligned to his stringline of truth.



This Psalm is not saying that our lives will be without low times or that we will never have troubles, it is saying that God will care for us and will walk with us and in due season we will bear fruit. Prosperity is not the abundance of wealth but the abundance of meaning in our lives.

James in comparing the tongue to a horse's bit or a ship's rudder is bringing us back to the way we speak, another aspect of righteousness

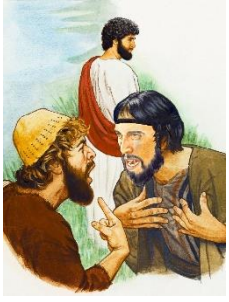
Many years ago, I had noticed that there was a couple in the church who interreacted differently. The woman was always nice to her husband, but he was very quiet and would start if she touched him. One day I saw them in the shops, but they didn't see me, she was verbally abusing him.

There have always been people who behave one way at church and another way when they think no one is watching but God sees all the time and he knows who is truly righteous and who just puts on a front. We all need to watch our words, what we say to one another and to other people we talk to. James says no one



can tame the tongue but one can certainly choose to give thoughts to God before they come out of our mouths and gradually learn to always seek to speak with love.

Jesus was speaking the truth in love to his disciples, trying to teach them what being the Messiah really meant for him and for them. When they just thought he was a Rabbi, he talked to them and the crowds in parables and explained when they were alone but now, he is trying to tell them things in plain words, but they were not able to hear what he was saying.



On the road they had been arguing amongst themselves about who would be the greatest, they were not speaking the truth in love they were only thinking of their prospects, but Jesus knew, and he also knew that they needed to learn about the hierarchy in the kingdom of heaven.

In society then, as it is now, there are people who have power or status, it often goes with money but not always and the disciples like everyone else thought it would be nice to be important.



Even in the church there is an assumption that a deacon is somehow better than a lay person, and a priest better yet and there are various roles and position up to Bishop and then Archbishop etc. Someone thought they would show that bishops are the servant of the church by having them enter

processions last but now the church assumes that the last person in a procession is the most important. It's not true, for instance: I have a role to play in serving the church, but that role does not make me any more important or better than anyone else in the church.



Jesus turned everything on its head and said that if we want to have status, we must help everyone else. In those days a child was a non-person until they were accepted as an adult, they had no worth outside their own family, but Jesus said that if we want to be great in God's

kingdom, we need to become insignificant, people of no account and that people we consider nonpersons are the very people through whom we will find Jesus and our Heavenly Father.

If we really want to be followers of Jesus, we do need to love God and our neighbour, we do need to be righteous. We need to be prepared to have our earlier ways of understanding taken apart so that a new understanding can open instead. We need to be prepared to do the work the Lord gives us and honour and encourage those around us in their work and faith, speaking the truth in love and constantly listening to God and so that he can change our lives to more closely align to his stringline of truth and love.