

**SERMON PREACHED BY REV. JAN CRAIG**

**AT SCARBORO UNITED CHURCH**

**September 20, 2009**

**Readings:** Proverbs 31:10-31  
Psalm 1  
Mark 9: 30-37

**“WISDOM FROM ALL AROUND US”**

In the past two years since I retired, my life has taken many unexpected twists and turns. I have travelled roads that have given me time to do a lot of reading and I have reveled in it. I have discovered authors that have become wonderful friends and their stories have opened my eyes to parts of the world and to life experience that has changed and challenged me.

Reading opens up whole new worlds. So does Scripture. And that is what happens today. We continue our exploration of God’s wisdom. Not in a way I might have expected – not in passages I might have chosen for my first Sunday - but then what **would** I have chosen? These are passages that become amazing founts of wisdom I think – for they speak to us of being A WOMAN, A MAN, A CHILD OF GOD --- and isn’t that what this life of ours is really all about?

**Psalm 1** – This wisdom Psalm reminds us how important it is to be a person of integrity - whose outer being matches our inner self. We are reminded that there is a source of wisdom that springs forth in each of us if we are open to listening for it. That spring has been fed by all those we have known who have nurtured us and taught us and cared for us and loved us, and that stream has been fed by a mountain stream way underneath sent by God, whose way is our direction and strength and who gives us hope, healing and courage when we most need it.

**Proverbs** – This particular passage is a piece of Scripture often avoided or used only in very particular circumstances. Written in Hebrew it is an acrostic poem, which means each line began with a letter ordered from the Hebrew alphabet. The author of this poem was more likely Lemuel’s mother. Bathsheba had never had an easy life and so she wrote advice to her son about the kind of woman he should marry. I think that may well be true because the woman described here is a strong, capable and well-rounded woman. She would be an equal to Samuel. Someone who would challenge him and love him and bring out the best in him --- a capable and wise woman --- and isn’t that the wife any mother would dream of for her son?

**Mark** – We meet the disciples struggling with who they are and who they are in relation to Jesus and to each other. They want to mean something, they want to count. They are struggling with what it means to be important. And in the midst of their struggle, Jesus picks up a child and tells them that to welcome and to care for the child, for the least among them, is what is really important. But they want to be **great** not a servant. It turns out that greatness lies in welcoming one not viewed as great by the culture - and at that time it was the child. Who would it be today? It is the one who is beyond the circle, the one outside, the one who needs a welcome?

Isn't it amazing where wisdom comes from. From a novel, from being cared for by another, from the image of a woman living a full life and from the reminder that we are called to serve those who are least and last among us. The sources of wisdom surprise us because they are so ordinary.

Rachel Naomi Remen, is a New York physician, wrote a book a few years ago titled Kitchen Table Wisdom. It begins "Everybody is a story." Her idea was that it used to be that everyone sat around kitchen tables, front porches, puzzles, games and living rooms telling stories – but that happens less and less now. And since that happens less and less, we know each other less, we know the stories less and perhaps because of that, we share our wisdom less too.

If you were fortunate this summer, you had time to sit around with .. grandchildren or children ... friends or neighbours ... or if you were very fortunate maybe a stranger or two on the way to becoming a friend ... just sitting around the table... telling stories. You were fortunate if you were one of the folk gathered around the kitchen tables here at Scarboro making oatcakes yesterday. Sharing conversation, stories, laughter and even a few tears. Yet that "just telling stories"; that "just sitting around the table" is the way wisdom gets passed along. It is the way we **learn** how to live a life worth living and remembering.

Robert Fulghum touched the world in a strange way when he wrote Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten a few years ago. Recently I read another article penned by him.

He was standing on a corner one rainy day. The rain had just stopped and a "train of small children each holding on to a loop of group rope passed by." (Doesn't that create an image in your mind.) One little boy let go of the rope and stepped aside --- he stopped ---- he shouted --- "Look, look, look – a rainbow!!!" We all looked up.

The sky had cleared. "A rainbow?" "Where?" Then we looked at the boy who was looking down and pointing at a puddle. In the grimy street, in an oily puddle – there it was --- a beautiful rainbow!! The teacher looked at the boy and the boy looked at the teacher. Now we all know the rules are clear – do not let go of that group rope – do not drop your loop. "Come back to the rope." she said. To the group she said. "Come here and take a look. Billy has found a rainbow." The children looked and leaped and shouted. The teacher smiled. Gently she took the boy by the hand, reconnected him and thanked him for seeing the rainbow. Fulghum ended his story by wondering where all the places that rainbows could be found were; and just how many rainbows had he overlooked; and by wondering how Billy would always feel about rainbows.

The kitchen table is a level playing field. There, everyone's story matters. Our hope and our vision is that within a congregation there is a level playing field too. Here at Scarboro everyone's story matters. The wisdom in the story of the most educated and powerful person is often not greater than the wisdom in the story of a child. The life of a child can teach us as much as the life of a sage. Most parents know the power of telling a child their own story so that they know who they are and to whom they belong. But we have other stories we need to hear too because we have a God to whom we belong and we need to know those stories so that we know who we are and to whom we belong as a Child of God. Not a story about what we have done or accomplished – a story about who we are and why we are here and what sustains us.

If in this life of following and living with God in God's world we are called to be anything, it is to be more than we thought we could be. More loving, more forgiving, more gracious and more faithful as we serve the last and the least around and among us. That is the wisdom of the ages that is passed on to us today.

Everyone of these stories has helped me to live. I am grateful for their wisdom. I am grateful for the stories I have already heard here at Scarboro and I look forward to so many more. Thinking about our stories and sharing them is what connects us together as God's people wherever we are found.

What stories have fed into your life wisdom? Thinking about that is your task for the days ahead. Who are the people who have shared their wisdom with you? Who seeks wisdom from you?

Amen