

THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches

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Today's Bible reading

Proverbs 1:20-33 ("Wisdom in the Marketplace")

Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.

At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?

Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded, and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.

Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.

For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster." Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

The Lord is King! Lift up your voice! (CH129)

Be still and know that I am God (CH755)

I, the Lord of sea and sky (CH251)

Today we start our summer season of themed services, as we turn to an often-sidelined Book of the Old Testament: the Book of Proverbs. Why, you might wonder, do we have so few Sundays when this book features in our services? At first sight, it may appear quite a simple issue, and not even a particularly theological one at that. You see, roughly two thirds of the Book of Proverbs is made up of exactly that: proverbs! And as we read these proverbs, we realise that each one can be quite different from its neighbour: Take these five examples from Proverbs chapter 10, verses 15 to 19:

*The wealth of the rich is their fortress;
the poverty of the poor is their ruin.*

*The wage of the righteous leads to life,
the gain of the wicked to sin.*

*Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life,
but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray.*

*Lying lips conceal hatred,
and whoever utters slander is a fool.*

*When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but the prudent are restrained in speech.*

Do you see the problem? Unlike reading from, say, a psalm, where you get a fair bit of poetry to get your teeth into, with Proverbs, it can pretty much be a case of one idea followed by another quite different idea, again and again and again. In the case of the five proverbs mentioned already, the topics being addressed seem random: security and ruination; righteousness and wickedness; obedience to instruction and disobedience; the perils of lying; the reality of long-windedness (preachers beware!).

And so, unless a writer of a Sunday sermon deliberately homes in on one particular proverb for a sermon (as we will certainly be doing this summer) it can be next to impossible to make sense of a chapter of proverbs taken as a whole.

But wait, because the Book of Proverbs is not all about random observations on lifestyle. A full first third of the book is very, very different in its content and its intention and its “feel”. And to my way of thinking Proverbs chapters 1-9 make for very interesting reading. Why? Because these nine introductory chapters have a clear and definite emphasis on the nature of wisdom. So this week we are going to kick off our journey with a look at what wisdom is. (Or possibly, as we will see, we are going to look at who wisdom is.) But first, listen to the words of John Bell and Graham Maule in a hymn from the big purple book. This, I should say, is the only hymn out of 825 items of praise which begins with the word, “She”.

*She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters,
hovering on the chaos of the world's first day;
she sighs and she sings, mothering creation,
waiting to give birth to all the Word will say.*

*She wings over earth, resting where she wishes,
lighting close at hand or soaring through the skies;
she nests in the womb, welcoming each wonder,
nourishing potential hidden to our eyes.*

*She dances in fire, startling her spectators,
waking tongues of ecstasy where dumbness reigned;*

*she weans and inspires all whose hearts are open,
nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained.*

*For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,
gifted by the Saviour in eternal love;
she is the key opening the scriptures,
enemy of apathy and heavenly dove.*

What is wisdom? Or who is wisdom? In the history of our faith we find the reality of God's Holy Spirit to be held in close association with wisdom. Not cleverness, but wisdom. ... Not intelligence, but wisdom. ... Not knowledge, but wisdom. And so when Bell and Maule wrote that hymn (a hymn ostensibly about the Creation of the world) they gave it an emphasis that was not only female, but an emphasis that presented an image of godly wisdom as being nothing less than the Third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. (And, just in passing, isn't it interesting that the ancient, classical Greek word for "wisdom" is "Sophia", which, to our way of thinking, is a girl's name.)

Wisdom played a big part not only in pagan Greece but also in the writings of the Hebrew Bible. And the first nine chapters of Proverbs has been described as poems "in praise of wisdom". In our reading today we find Wisdom presented as a person - and yes, a woman - making herself known to the city, as she wanders around the roadways and meeting places. Reading from the Message version of the Bible:
Lady Wisdom goes out in the street and shouts.

At the town centre she makes her speech.

In the middle of the traffic she takes her stand.

At the busiest corner she calls out:

"Simpletons! How long will you wallow in ignorance?

Cynics! How long will you feed your cynicism?

Idiots! How long will you refuse to learn?

As you read Proverbs chapters 1-9, a note of caution on an oft-misunderstood biblical word: in the very first chapter we find the phrase, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge", yet we might find it hard to make sense of what "fear" actually represents. Are we to be terrified of God? No! Rather, those who are wise will hold God in awe and in wonder and in reverence. They will identify and own, deep down inside themselves, that God is the ruler of all: planets and galaxies; life and death. The wise will come to understand how inspiring - how marvellous - God is. And this poses a question: are we able to break free of viewing God as the great, heavenly figure of command and control? Are we willing to contemplate the divine ruler of all that is in terms of awe and wonder and reverence? For us to enter upon the path of wisdom must involve us in examining our faith, our consciences, our inherited assumptions, so that we can take on board who it is that God is. Neither a vicious ogre who roars and ravages, nor a dominating bully who wants to subdue and control. Instead, God seeks to bestow on us the gift of wisdom: a holy attribute shared by heaven with earth, made available to each one as we draw near to our Maker and Redeemer. As we read in Proverbs chapter 9:

Wisdom goes to town, stands in a prominent place,

and invites everyone within sound of her voice: ...

"Leave your impoverished confusion and live!

Walk up the street to a life with meaning."

Amen.

Praying for others

God of all,
as we anticipate changes to the leadership of the UK Government in Westminster,
we pray for all those involved in the process.

We ask that this period will not be marked simply by jostling for power, but that those who assume new positions will be primarily motivated by ideals of service, an attitude of integrity and honesty and, above all, the determination to do their best for the people of this country.

We ask, especially, that new ways be found to make the essentials of life more affordable for all those who are currently struggling to deal with the cost of living and to provide for themselves and their families.

We ask also that opportunities may be seized by the new government to challenge the way that divisions in our society – between communities, races and minorities – are stoked and emphasised for political ends.

May there be a real determination to nurture unity, show tolerance and compassion, and to respect the dignity of all our citizens.

In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers. Amen.

Weekly Updates ...

Summer services 2026: These shorter acts of morning worship begin on Sunday.

Charity Open Garden event: Everyone is invited to visit "The Geans" on Gosford Road, Longniddry, to view the property's lovely garden. This charitable event will be taking place on Sunday 5th July from 1-5pm, with admission at £6 per adult (also, tea and cakes available for £5). Proceeds will go to the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust.

"Sing at 6.30": Gladsmuir Parish Church's worship evening for July is set for Sunday 19th July on the theme: "Songs of Light and Glory": Powerful, uplifting hymns to illuminate our praise, spanning several lands, a range of eras and a variety of musical styles. Refreshments served after the benediction. Admission free, with a retiral offering to benefit Christian Aid Scotland.

Calling Gladsmuir readers!: Would you like to receive *The Sunday Focus* for 26th July, plus 2nd and 9th August? If so, please drop Abigail Morrison an e-mail on abimor1808@gmail.com, specifically requesting this. Data protection requirements make this a necessity for these three Sundays, with normal service resuming from 16th August onwards. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Fancy a cuppa? A reminder that our coffee catch-up will take place at Starbucks near the top of the Coal Road on Friday 31st July at 10am. All welcome!

New Age Kurling: Tuesdays from 2-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church.

Sporting Memories Group: Thursdays from 10.30am-12 noon in Room 3, Longniddry Church.

Community Art Group: Join us to explore tapestry weaving. All welcome to come along on Thursdays at 2.15pm in Longniddry Church, Room 2. Free of charge.