

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 20th September 2015 10am

Revd Val Reid

Proverbs 31: 10-31

- ¹⁰ A capable wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
- ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
- ¹² She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.
- ¹³ She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.
- ¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant,
she brings her food from far away.
- ¹⁵ She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her servant-girls.
- ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- ¹⁷ She girds herself with strength,
and makes her arms strong.
- ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
- ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
- ²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor,
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- ²¹ She is not afraid for her household when it snows,
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
- ²² She makes herself coverings;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- ²³ Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the land.
- ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them;
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
- ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
- ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
²⁸ Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband too, and he praises her:
²⁹ 'Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.'
³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
³¹ Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Mark 9: 30-37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;
³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.'
³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.
33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

Sermon

A capable minister who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
She rises while it is still night and answers emails.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
She puts her hands to the washing up.
She opens her hand to the poor, and helps with Wednesday Club and the Night Shelter.
She is not afraid for her congregation when it snows, for she is on property committee, and has prepared a budget for the boiler replacement next year.
She opens her mouth with wisdom, and every single sermon deserves an A*.
She certainly does not eat the bread of idleness.

We could all re-write this well-known passage from Proverbs to apply to our own lives.
And part of me loves this portrait of a strong, capable, competent woman.
Part of me longs to be like her.

To know exactly what I should be doing.

To be approved of and praised by everyone because I perform all my tasks on time, and perform them well.

Actually, part of me just loves the idea of sailing down to the market like a merchant ship, and laughing at the time to come!

But part of me recognises that this is a very subtle temptation.

The temptation to earn my salvation by doing.

The temptation to think God will admire me because I work very hard, and am above criticism.

The temptation to win the competition for who is the greatest Christian, by absorbing all the 'oughts' that hover temptingly in church life.

When the stewards decided that September would be the month for all of us to review our commitment to Hinde Street, we were very aware of that temptation.

There was a risk that this review could turn into a great big guilt trip.

Are you doing enough?

Are you giving enough?

Come on, sign up for another committee.

Arrange the flowers.

Make the tea.

Increase your standing order.

And so when we asked you to ask yourself 'How am I serving God in my world?' there were two questions:

- Where is God prompting me to do more?
- Or even, perhaps less?

Jesus was very aware of this problem too.

When he overhears his disciples arguing about who is the greatest, he sits them down to teach them a lesson.

That's not how the Kingdom works.

His model is a little child.

Not a cute little Disney moppet.

But a child in Middle Eastern Jewish society two thousand years ago.

A non-person.

With no rights.

No voice.

No status.

God loves this child.
Not because they get up early and do their homework.
Not because they do their fair share of household chores.
Not because they are seen and not heard, like all good children.
But just because.
Because it is the nature of God to love.

So how do we find our way in this complex tension?
If we are not to be overworking do-ers, risking burnout because we take on far too much,
are we just to sit and do nothing, because God loves us anyway?

I think there is another way.
My experience of children is that whatever they do, they do with their full attention.
Whether it's watching an ant in the garden, or playing a computer game.
Whether it's drawing a picture of mummy, or dressing up as a fireman.
Sometimes their attention span is not as long as we might wish, but while they are doing
whatever they are doing, they are utterly absorbed in it.

I think it's the same with the capable wife in Proverbs.
Whether she is preparing food, making linen garments, or buying property, she does it as
well as she can.
She is present to the task which she has undertaken.

And there is no distinction between holy tasks which matter to God, and mundane tasks
which God has no interest in, which don't somehow count.
All of life is sacred.
All of life can reflect glimpses of glory.
All of life can be lived well.

So an annual review of our lives is a good idea.
Not to check out that we are doing enough to earn salvation.
Not to list our heavenly brownie points.
But to ask ourselves this:

Whether at church or at home or at work,
What am I doing that brings me life?
What am I doing in which I can see something of God?
What am I doing that will give glimpses of God's love to others?
Am I doing it with care?
With my full attention?
Am I doing it well?

Mother Anne Lee, a Shaker of the 18th century, said this:
*Do all your work as though you had a thousand years to live;
and as if you knew you must die tomorrow.*

And there is another question too.
Remembering that little child whom Jesus introduced to his anxious disciples.
When am I making time for NOT doing?
For simply being still and knowing that God loves me?

Amen