

Mark 8:27-38: *Jesus asks his disciples who the people say he is, and then who they say he is. Peter replies that he is the Christ. Then Jesus predicts his coming death and resurrection, but Peter tries to correct him. Jesus responds by rebuking Peter, and then teaching that all who seek to follow him must take up their crosses, and not be ashamed of him.*

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

The Christian church at the time of the Renaissance was riding high. It dominated the personal, social and political lives of Europeans. The landscape was dotted with its magnificent cathedrals. The church could command armies to do its will. Its leaders lived like princes, surrounded by wealth and pomp.

In its return to the Bible, the Reformation rejected this “theology of glory” in favour of a “theology of the cross.” To follow Jesus is to live lives of service to others, to serve rather than to control and dominate. It means the opposite of being proud of station and status for ourselves at the expense of others.

The “theology of the cross” or “to deny oneself” does not mean a contrived kind of humility. We do not follow Jesus by demeaning ourselves. We are called upon to do the very best we can with the talents and abilities God has given us. To “deny oneself” means to keep one’s priorities in harmony with what Jesus told us in the two “great commandments” -- love God and love your neighbour (Mark 12:28-31). (*Michael Rogness*)

COCU56B Readings

The readings from Proverbs and Psalm 19 speak about the wisdom that comes from obeying God’s instruction, directions, and ways. The Gospel speaks about the suffering that may come from following God’s ways. James speaks about the importance of disciplining our tongues, using them for praise, blessing and teaching, rather than cursing. The themes can be summed up in one word: *integrity*. We live with integrity when we embrace God’s wisdom and live it out, rather than just speaking words that we do not put into action. We live with integrity when we stay faithful to God’s ways, and speak God’s message, even though it often results in suffering, struggle and sacrifice. We live with integrity when Jesus is proclaimed as the Christ, while understanding that he is a crucified God who calls us to take up our own crosses. We live with integrity when our lives reflect the cross and resurrection of Jesus. When our words, our thoughts, our attitudes and our actions align with one another, and with the ways of God that were taught and lived by Jesus, then our lives have integrity and make a life-giving contribution to the world.

The call for integrity may seem naïve in a world in which corruption, expediency and power games appear to be the order of the day. It is not uncommon to hear political, business, community and religious leaders say one thing and do something completely different. We can see that self-aggrandisement, self-protection, and power-grabbing are becoming the norm, especially among those who are leaders. Unfortunately, when integrity gets lost, so too does justice. It becomes very hard to get aid to those who need it, when leaders siphon off money and resources for themselves. It can be tough to get laws changed when corporate lobbies invest millions in maintaining an unjust legal advantage. It can be disheartening to work on behalf of the marginalised and vulnerable, when legal and financial systems are biased against them. It can be tempting to sacrifice our integrity just to get things done. But, to do this is to lose faith in the Gospel, and to violate the justice and integrity of God’s Reign. As hard as it can sometimes be to hold on to our integrity, in the end, it’s the only thing that can bring about authentic transformation in our world. Signs that integrity is becoming increasingly important to the people of the world are all there – in the exposés of corrupt and immoral behaviour among leaders, in the call for more just systems through various protest movements, and in the growing power in online and other forms of citizen activism. As followers of Christ, let’s celebrate integrity wherever we find it, and let’s seek to maintain integrity as one of our highest values.

(John van de Laar

Psalm 19: *Creation proclaims God's glory. God's law that brings life, refreshes the soul, gives insight and wisdom, and corrects him when he goes astray.*

The heavens are telling the glory of God;

and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

yet their voice goes out through all the earth,

and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is your servant warned;

in keeping them there is great reward.

But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Proverbs 1:20-33: *Wisdom cries out in public for the crowd to turn away from their foolishness, but, in spite of the invitation, the people have refused to listen. So, they will receive no help when disaster comes, but those who obey will be protected.*

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.”

James 3:1-12: *The tongue is a small thing; it has power for good or ill. People have tamed all sorts of animals, but struggle to tame the tongue. For God's people, blessing and curses should not come out of the same mouth.*

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue - a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.