

The book of Proverbs is wisdom literature. It's a collection of practical wisdom and wise sayings within the Jewish tradition. I don't normally preach from Proverbs, but it occurs to me that we seem to be in short supply of common sense and wisdom lately in our society, so maybe this is a good time for a sermon on Proverbs, because like Bertrand Russell said, "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." Today, we ask for God's wisdom to be upon us as well as the confidence to live out the wisdom God grants us.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of writings. It's often attributed to King Solomon. King Solomon, of course, asked God for wisdom and was granted it. When I was eight years old, I heard the story of Solomon in Sunday School. That night, before I went to bed I got down on my knees and I asked God to please give me wisdom. Make me wise. I remember it vividly because I was explaining to God that I wanted to be like Solomon in his wisdom, and I clearly left out the part about being like Solomon and all his wealth and riches, because well, I ended becoming a minister. That said, I do believe that God will grant any of us wisdom when we ask for it and seek it out. Scripture is one of those gems to find it.

Our passage begins with these words, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold." We start then with this idea that one's name, and it's not your literal name like Richard or Rebecca, what your name implies about your reputation as in "All I have is my good name." It's more important than silver or gold, or any riches. In other words, being known as a person with a good reputation and good character is one of the most valuable things we can ever have in this life. This passage will show us what it looks like to be the type of person who has a good name. Before we do that, the writer wants to remind us about who we are, to level the playing field a bit. We read next, "The rich and the poor have this in common, the Lord is the maker of them all." In other words, don't start thinking that your wealth or lack thereof matters to God. We all come from the same source. Our maker is the Lord.

We're all the same in that sense. We're all going to end up hopefully in the same Heaven. The habit we have as

humans of dividing up ourselves into categories like rich or poor just falls apart in light of this divine reality. Being wealthy or lacking wealth is neither better nor worse, spiritually speaking. In fact, the commentators point out that traditionally the rich and the poor each have lessons to learn and some specific responsibility to themselves and to each other. The poor have the challenge of learning to exercise patience, contentment and dependence on God, while the wealthy have the challenge of learning to exercise charity, generosity, beneficence, and thankfulness to God. These then are actually complimentary roles. Remember, Jesus said we will always have the poor with us. There are roles then. There are learnings, whether we are rich or poor. God is the maker of us all. We are all equal before God.

Next, we discover that the rich and the poor together meet at the bar of God's justice. The text reads, "Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity and the rod of anger will fail." As I read those words this week, I thought again about our current context today. Where have we sown injustice in our own lives, in our society, or world? What calamities are we reaping because of that injustice? As we look around us, where do we see this truth of scripture playing out? Injustice will always come back to bite us. So, it's in our best interest to seek solutions from the get-go, or at least to make corrections along the way. But notice the next statement, "And the rod of anger will fail." Matthew Henry wrote about this first way back in the 17th century, and his comments are just as relevant now as they were then. He wrote this, "Abused power will not last. If the rod of authority turns into a rod of anger, if people rule by passion instead of prudence, and instead of the public welfare aim at nothing so much as the gratifying of their own resentments, it shall fail and be broken and their power shall not bear them out in their exorbitances."

I'm just struck by these words. We see the rod of anger being used all around us. We observe people angry, seeking power, control, authority through that anger, and the aim is so connected to their resentments instead of the wider good, instead of justice. Scripture then reminds us here that this approach, that the rod of anger will always fail. What is the alternative? We come to the latter section of this text and we read this, "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share

their bread with the poor." Here again, we hear the invitation to those who are rich. Those who have some wealth are to live charitably and generously, sharing even their own bread with those who hunger.

I think we take special note here of the words, "Sharing ones own bread." It's more akin to having a meal with another than merely offering a handout. There's a sense of community and relationship being assumed here, that those who have are not removed from, but are a part of the same community as those who have not. The action of generosity, the action of sharing one's own bread is for the common or the community good. It is these very actions that lead, according to scripture, to one becoming good and developing a good name.

Glen Winnick is one such good name. Glen was a volunteer firefighter who leapt into action as a first responder the day the towers were hit on 9/11, 20 years ago this Saturday. Glen Winnick decided to help others that day, and he did it before he died when the south tower fell on him. His brother, Jay Winnick, then decided to help others and founded the organization, My Good Deed, in Glen's honor. My Good Deed is a nonprofit that created and oversees 9/11 Day, a national day of kindness and charitable service in observance of the lives that were lost on September 11, 2001.

The organization sends over one million meal packs for donation to people in need annually, but part of what they do is simply encourage all forms of charitable acts and giving. "Such kindnesses," Winnick says, "Should be the lasting legacy that comes out of the tragedy of September 11th in remembrance of those whose acts of kindness or generosity, big or small, helped a reeling nation." Winnick says, "That day, we shared our common humanity. We didn't let it divide us, which is all too much what the environment is about right now. One of the blessings that comes out of this is knowing that people can make a difference."

The anniversary of 9/11 is upon us, and right now we're facing national and global tragedies again. This time, from the effects of the pandemic, COVID-19, to Hurricane Ida, to the needs in Haiti, Afghanistan, and so on. In the midst of so much loss in our world, we who have been blessed with resources are invited to step into the role that our maker has given us, and to choose

generosity, generosity of spirit, to choose beneficence and thankfulness to God. Proverbs reminds us of a way forward, of an alternative.

Certainly, there are many ways we might be moved to respond. I know our very own Episcopal Relief and Development is of course, as they always do, collecting donations for these current crises through their disaster response. But there are many others. The call of God is always to be heeded, and it comes from God. We are only to ask a simple question, "God, what would you have me do?" Then act on the inspiration and wisdom God gives you in light of your particular circumstances, rich or poor. Then discover the blessedness of God when you do.

Thanks be to God.