

Sunday September 6, 2015

Scripture Readings – **Proverbs 22: 1-2,8-9, 22-23**
James 2: 14-17

Meditation – “Clothed in Christ – always in style”

One of my favourite writers over the years, about things Christian, is Fred Buechner. A Presbyterian Minister who has spent most of his career being an english teacher/guidance counselor at a private boy’s school in New England. In between all of that he writes these beautiful books, now he blogs. I checked his blog for this week and indeed he has something to say about our reading from Proverbs.

The trouble with being rich is that since you can solve with your cheque book virtually all the practical problems that bedevil ordinary people, you are left in your leisure with nothing but the great human problems to contend with: how to be happy, how to love and be loved, how to find meaning and purpose in your life. In desperation the rich are continually tempted to believe that they can solve these problems too with their cheque books, which is presumably what led Jesus to remark one day that for a rich man to get to Heaven is about as easy as for a Cadillac to get through a revolving door. That used to be one of our great tricks as kids, when you left the parkade at Eaton’s store there was a long set of doors and the 5 of us bratty, little Wilson kids would beg mom to go through the revolving door. With her disability, that was a challenge, but she was a trooper, and when she would finally relent, and as soon as she stepped in, the 5 of us would push that door and mom would be propelled into the Eatons store! We were such lovely children! But thinking back to what Fred said, about the rich, they can solve problems with their money but they haven’t got with their money the stuff to deal with those bigger questions of life. As I read these words I kept thinking about Donald Trump. We chuckle but this man is running for the Republican nomination for the US Presidency of the largest, wealthiest nation in the world. Did you catch the hair thing earlier this week; he let some woman run her fingers through his hair, but I think it was solid because it didn’t move much. But, here is a man who when he was announcing his nomination, hired 14 hundred to fill a stadium so he could announce it. But he hired all those people, because he can do that. He’ll tell you again and again that his money has allowed him to do all these things in life and he will take what he has learned from that to run the US. So both of these passages pushed together today, the ancient wisdom of Solomon and then the wisdom of the late first century and early second century of the Christian era from James, the message is pretty obvious in both of them and there is no time given to subtlety or metaphors. They both ask us what is the quality of your character. Who are you? How do you live your life? James remarks in that facetious

statement, are you clothed in Christ? He's saying it as a challenge and really a put-down. When we get up in the morning we go through that process, you wake and decide what you're going to wear today. When I was little it was much easier, we had a traditional 1920's home where the closets were very small. My sister and I shared this closet. We had our Sunday dress, our school uniform and 2 white blouses that was worn under the uniform. We had a drawer in a dresser. But now I have a walk-in closet and I stand there and look and look and look. What James was getting at, this notion of dressing in the morning, with the values we have from Jesus. How has Jesus interpreted the way of God for us. We need to put on those values as sure as we dress for the weather. When people encounter you, what virtues do they observe or experience with you because that is the measure of your character. How do other people experience you? Both passages are crystal clear. They remind us that leading a virtuous, faithful, ethical life has nothing to do with whether you're rich or poor or anything in between. It's a matter of the choices you make. It's about how prepared you are to embody this faith in everyday life. I sat and wrote this sermon yesterday afternoon in my den at home, with 3 shelves of books on Spirituality at Work. It's a catch phrase for being Christian everywhere but church. That's what James and Solomon were worried about. How do you be faithful outside of church because in here it's easy. We're all of one mind or at least we feel somehow compelled to be here together. But when we go out there, we go to different places, different circumstances and different issues. Are there places that you are safe being the faithful person you are? Or maybe, when you go out of here do you feel equipped, do you understand these virtues and values of your faith so that when you go out into that world and you are contended with something, you know what virtue to pull up.

I ran across a paper based on a much larger research project that's now been published as a book and it's very interesting, it's by a Baptist Minister who is a professor in the ethics institute at the Texas A & M University. Dr. Garry Nation has published widely in the area of what he calls "Character Deficiency Syndrome." He suggests that the ills of our world today could all find their source in a crisis of character. He goes on to assert in this article that too often we fail to connect faith, morality and a happy life are the building blocks of Christian character or, as James said, "being clothed in Christ." In recent weeks we've all had plenty of opportunity to consider "character". I'm referring to the Mike Duffy trial in Ottawa. Mike Duffy is the senator who took \$90,000.00 from the then Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister's office, Nigel Wright, to pay off what was determined to be money taken for his housing allowance for his principle residence, which in fact was not his principle residence.

I want to share with you 2 things:

The first one has to do with Mike Duffy, the correspondence between his lawyer (Payne) and then, Ben Perrin, who became the chief of staff of the Prime Minister after Nigel Wright resigned.

Shortly after 9 pm Thursday Ms. Payne responded to Mr. Perrin with a list of several new demands from Mr. Duffy. The senator wanted confirmation that his case would be withdrawn from an audit of expenses being conducted by Deloitte and that a Senate committee would state that his expenses were in order. Other requests included written assurances that he meets the constitutional requirements to sit as a senator from PEI, that his legal fees be covered and that Conservative MPs and senators stick to the PMO's media lines. Mr. Duffy also insisted that he be kept "whole" – meaning that someone else would actually pay back the money. "This is quite the list of demands," Mr. Perrin reported.

Consider those, in light of what you heard from Proverbs and James.

The second one has to do with the testimony from Nigel Wright, who was the chief of staff of the PMO. He is a devout Anglican, which means he goes to church regularly. That is known about him in circles in Ottawa. He doesn't hide the fact from anyone. It is part of who he is.

"My view was, I was helping out. I was doing a good deed," he said. "It's Matthew 6: Do things quietly, not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

The Bible verse Wright referred to is Matthew 6: 3. In the New American Standard Version of the Bible, the full line reads: "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." The preceding passage advises the reader not to "sound the trumpet" when giving money to the poor.

On Wednesday, Wright testified about a "scenario for repayment" in which the PMO would cover Duffy's expenses, the senator would admit to a "possible error" on his expense forms, and the potential scandal would quietly go away.

It caused me to pause in a news story to which I was responding in a knee-jerk manner. How does this speak to Christian character? Is the voice of Christ heard in this exchange? I wonder.

Solomon and James, in their own eras, recognized that faith in God can and should permeate every aspect of our lives. Be aware of our faith and the values and the virtues that rise out of that in the mundane moments as well.