June 14, 2020 • Celebrating Graduates • Online Worship

“Wisdom”
Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

Proverbs 4:4b-13
“Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.” Hear, my child, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered; and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.

This morning, church, we rejoice in this celebration of our graduates of the Class of 2020. Much has been made of this strange year in which they have reached the long-awaited moment of their graduation—all the things they’ve had to forego, events cancelled, awards ceremonies and commencements taking place virtually, even parties and family celebrations re-configured at a safe distance.

I know, graduates! You don’t need me to remind you! So, what I really want to remind you of this morning is this—your church family that has helped raise you up and support you, your church family loves you and will continue to pray for you and gives thanks to God for who you are.

Church, if you haven’t already done so, be sure to read the June Sentinel which you can find on our website and read about these amazing graduates. I know that with everything going on in our world these days, we can feel anxious and worried about the future. Your medicine for that today is to read about our graduates, look at their faces, hear their stories and rejoice that the world is still in good hands and that the future is bright with hope.

It’s wonderful that a few of them could join us in worship leadership today. You can see and hear them in person. But know as well that many others are joining in worship via Facebook or YouTube, as they do each week, and that in this community that has nurtured us all over the years continues to provide strength and solace and vision and courage for such a time as this.

In some ways, today sums up the best of who we are as United Methodists. John and Charles Wesley launched the Methodist movement on a campus. John Wesley was an Oxford don who lectured at the university. His first groups of Methodists were fellow students.

No wonder that during his own ministry, Wesley was instrumental in starting schools all over Britain. Here in the States, as the early circuit rider preachers traversed hill and vale to bring people the Word of God’s amazing grace, they also distributed Bibles and books as they went. They had virtually no possessions of their own. Instead, their saddle bags were packed with books and with Methodist periodicals.

The early preachers also knew that they needed to be teachers. So in addition to the gift of God’s love they gave people the gift of literacy, reading.

For the Wesleys, education, the gaining of knowledge, was a core piece in the formation of a person of faith. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, MIND, soul and strength” was a commandment, not an option. They insisted, in their earliest groups and still to this day, that WHAT we know is important, and that THAT we know is important, meaning that we approach this world eyes wide open, always ready and eager to learn more, to see more, to go deeper.

How essential this is in this moment, as we strive together for deeper understanding, honest empathy, with a deep conviction that together we can create more just, more humane, more equitable, more loving ways of living together with one another and with this planet.

We just have to open our minds to it. AND we have to open our hearts to it, this sacred task now before us.
The Wesleys didn’t value knowledge alone. Charles Wesley put it this way in one of the hymns he wrote: “Unite the pair so long disjoin’d, Knowledge and vital Piyety: Learning and Holiness combined, And Truth and Love, [for all to] see…”


Rev. Jonathan Grace, Senior Pastor at Grace United Methodist Church in Dallas writes: “when I think about Christian piety and what God demands of us, I think about two verses: Mark 12:29-31 and Micah 6:8. Mark can be summed up by saying that the Greatest Commandment is to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. Micah answers the question of what God requires of us—to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.”

Knowledge and vital piety. Learning and holiness combined. Justice, kindness, and love. Walking humbly with our God.

We heard Alejandro read our Scripture lesson from Proverbs about the Wisdom of God. God’s Wisdom gets at the question of not just what we need to know—but rather, how we are to live as people of God. In Proverbs, Wisdom is often described as the Way, meaning a path worn by constant use. A path frequently traveled. A way of living. It was from this understanding that the early Christians were known as the people of the Way, for this is what Jesus meant when he told us: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” This living way is the Wisdom of God.

It is through Wisdom that we are taught to pay attention to our relations with God and with one another, to seek harmony and right relationship with all. And it is through Wisdom that we attain what the Psalmist calls “the fear of the Lord”, the awe of God, the gut awareness that God is the Lord of Life, the Creator of everything, the source of all goodness, beauty and truth, justice and peace, amazing grace.

Class of 2020: may God’s full blessings be upon you in the next chapter of your life. As you learn, as you grow, as your knowledge increases, may your love of God increase as well. May you live more faithfully and more passionately. May you use your knowledge and the privilege it affords to serve others and may whatever vocation or position you attain enable you to give back more generously to those who still in need.

We, your church family, will continue to love you and pray for you. We will walk the Way with you. And with you now, in these days, we pledge to do better together.

Amen