

Worship for 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to worship. You join this morning for worship which has been prepared by members of the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit. Our thanks to those who have prepared or take part in the service. My name is Audrey Simpson and the preacher today is Safford Mortimer.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Let us be still as we remember we are in the presence of the Living God.

Silence

Come friends far and near let us worship the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our minds and with all our strength.

Hymn: StF 689 – Summoned by the God who made us

- 1. Summoned by the God who made us
rich in our diversity,
gathered in the name of Jesus,
richer still in unity.**

*Let us bring the gifts that differ
and, in splendid, varied ways,
sing a new Church into being
one in faith and love and praise.*

- 2. Radiant risen from the water,
robed in holiness and light,
male and female in God's image,
male and female, God's delight.**
*Let us bring the gifts that differ
and, in splendid, varied ways,*

*sing a new Church into being
one in faith and love and praise.*

- 3. Trust the goodness of creation;
trust the Spirit strong within,
dare to dream the vision promised
sprung from seed of what has been.**

*Let us bring the gifts that differ
and, in splendid, varied ways,
sing a new Church into being
one in faith and love and praise.*

- 4. Bring the hopes of every nation;
bring the art of every race.
Weave a song of peace and justice;
let it sound through time and space.**

*Let us bring the gifts that differ
and, in splendid, varied ways,
sing a new Church into being
one in faith and love and praise.*

- 5. Draw together at one table
all the human family;
shape a circle ever wider
and a people ever free.**

*Let us bring the gifts that differ
and, in splendid, varied ways,
sing a new Church into being
one in faith and love and praise.*

Delores Dufner, OSB

Opening Prayers

Let us offer our prayers of approach, praise and confession to God.

Loving God, we thank you that you hold us in this time and for all time, that you know our comings

and goings, and are intimate with the innermost thoughts of our hearts. Because of this we can come to you in confidence and in trust. Enable us by your Spirit to worship you through Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord God, we give you thanks and praise for your Son Jesus Christ who showed us:

- that true greatness is known in serving others.
- that the way of wisdom is found in childlike humility and in being peace-loving and considerate
- how to be sincere, merciful and impartial in our dealings with others.

With hearts lifted high, we offer you our thanks and praise for loving us and showing us the way to be your disciples. **Amen**

Prayer of confession

Loving Lord, despite our best intentions we fail to live up to our calling as people of Jesus' way. We acknowledge that though we know that in your eyes, it is not social status, or wealth or reputation that count, we have shown partiality in our dealing with others. We have favoured the wealthy, the wise and the important.

Lord in you mercy

Forgive our sins.

Loving Lord, Despite knowing for as long as we have been followers of Jesus that true greatness is found in service we acknowledge the times that we have lorded it over others, or despised the need we see in our neighbours and failed to be merciful.

Lord in your mercy

Forgive our sins

Forgive us we pray when our lives are taken over by the sort of values that set us at odds with your way. Amen

Declaration of forgiveness

Hear the good news. In Christ's name your sins are forgiven.

Amen

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Gospel: – Mark: 9. 30-37 (NRSVA)

Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³⁰They 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.

Who Is the Greatest?

³³Then 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.'

Old Testament: – Proverbs 3:13-23 (NRSVA)

The True Wealth

¹³Happy are those who find wisdom,
and those who get understanding,
¹for her income is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.
¹⁵She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
¹⁶Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honour.
¹⁷Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
¹⁸She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of
her;
those who hold her fast are called happy.

God's Wisdom in Creation

¹⁹The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
²⁰by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

The True Security

²¹My child, do not let these escape from your
sight:
keep sound wisdom and prudence,
²²and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
²³Then you will walk on your way securely
and your foot will not stumble.

Epistle: – James 3.13 - 4. 3, 7, 8a (NRSVA)

Two Kinds of Wisdom

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you?
Show by your good life that your works are done
with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you
have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your
hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.
¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above,
but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where
there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also
be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But
the wisdom from above is first pure, then

peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy
and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or
hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is
sown in peace for those who make peace.

Friendship with the World

^{4:1}Those conflicts and disputes among you,
where do they come from? Do they not come
from your cravings that are at war within you?
²You want something and do not have it; so you
commit murder. And you covet something and
cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and
conflicts. You do not have, because you do not
ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you
ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on
your pleasures.

⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the
devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to
God, and he will draw near to you.

Hymn: StF 706 – Christ be our Light

**1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.**

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

**2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.**

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today

- 3. Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.**
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.
- 4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.**
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.
- 5. Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.**
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

Sermon

Sermon topic: Wise up, guys!

It's not a word you are likely to use, unless you're buying a new toothbrush or watching an old comedy film. But today it's our key word. *Wisdom.*

It may not set our pulses racing, yet it speaks to such issues as the Taliban, Twitter trolls and the debate over same-sex marriage, as we shall see. Join me, Stafford, in finding out why.

Wisdom featured in our Bible reading from an epistle -- or letter -- that's a bit of a mystery too. It's like one that lands on our doormat with unfamiliar writing on the envelope. Inside it says "from James" -- but James who?

Quite possibly, and excitingly, Jesus's brother of that name. At one time he fell out with Jesus, like all his brothers and sisters. They couldn't understand his urgent mission from God.

But after the crucifixion and resurrection, we find Jacob (the more Hebrew form of his name) as a staunch apostle of his brother's gospel. He became head of the first Christian congregation, the Jewish church in Jerusalem.

But equally, scholars tell us, the Epistle of James could be by a different person addressing fellow Christian Jews scattered across the Mediterranean, about 60 years after Christ: "To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, greetings."

So let's concentrate on the message. We find a lot about wisdom in the Old Testament of the Bible -- whole books on it -- and it means not just cleverness or deep thought, but an all-embracing package of faith, personal principles and practical action. The *wise* way to live.

The Bible gives many examples of what's wise and what isn't, but today we're going to concentrate on these words from the epistle: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and compassionate deeds." (Chapter 3 verse 17) And we'll see how this rules out three kinds of modern behaviour.

The first is fanaticism. The perverted wisdom of fanatics is pitiless dogma. It is applied with a brutal violence towards anyone who does not believe or practise every detail. Dogma is not

based on genuine spiritual faith, whether Islamic, Christian or secular idealism.

(The Church has been – still is? – among those guilty of dogmatism. It has treated cruelly those branded as heretics or followers of “false” religions.)

Fanaticism is at heart a love of power, usually exercised by men – whether rough burly men with guns or smooth-talking men behind presidential desks. The fact that fanatics have to rely on force to maintain their power reveals the weakness of their wisdom. In the end it must fail and crumble.

True wisdom that lasts for ever, says James, is “peaceable and gentle, full of mercy and good deeds”. He was clearly inspired by Christ’s Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth . . . Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy . . . Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5 verses 5, 7, 9)

Secondly, the wise way to live rules out what James calls “bitter envy and selfish ambition” and being “boastful and false to the truth”. Such perverted wisdom he calls “devilish”, using a word not found anywhere else in the New Testament.

Today’s social media on the internet is sadly poisoned by bitterness, envy and falsehood. People use such platforms as Twitter and Facebook to attack – anonymously – public figures, or individuals from their personal circles. Venom is poured on those who express different opinions or who are envied for their success in life.

If we are tempted to be critical of others, Christ has a message for us: “How can you say to your neighbour, ‘Let me take the speck out of your

eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.” (Matthew 7 verses 4, 5)

As James says, “The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle.”

The next word he uses rules out a third kind of modern behaviour; one that is relevant both to our national conversation and to us as members of the Church. Prejudice.

Godly wisdom, writes James in Greek, is *eupeithes*. This has been given different thoughtful translations. Among them are “open-minded” (Revised English Bible), “submissive” (New International Version) and “friendly” (Good News Bible). Perhaps the best appears in the much-respected New Revised Standard Version: “willing to yield”.

Willing to yield: what does that say about angrily shouting down other people’s opinions? What does it say about the “cancel culture”, when those with unfashionable views are excluded from public speaking engagements, or sacked from university posts?

A wisdom that is open-minded and willing to yield says that truth and constructive action emerge only when all sides of a debate are heard, and honour is given to opponents. This is as pertinent to Christians as to anyone else.

A Methodist minister, the Rev. Michael Townsend, wrote an excellent commentary on the Epistle of James. It was published 25 years ago, but his comment on *eupeithes* could not be more up to date for such issues as same-sex marriage:

“We should ask ourselves more often than perhaps we do whether the fellow-Christian with

whom we disagree might not sometimes be right! At the very least it means granting others the sincerity and integrity of their view. This easily-overlooked virtue becomes all the more important when the church is deeply divided over some matter of ethics or practice.”

So we say thank you, James, whoever you were, for writing from the fulness of your heart to the people of your time, and equally of our time. Thank you for showing us that living in God’s wisdom, grounded in Jesus the Christ, rules out fanaticism and, perhaps closer to home for us, envy and prejudice. We cherish your words that “the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and compassionate deeds”.

Hymn: StF 500 – Happy are they who find the grace

- 1. Happy are they who find the grace,
the blessing of God's chosen race,
the wisdom coming from above,
the faith that sweetly works by love.**
- 2. Happy beyond description we,
who say ‘the Saviour died for me,’
the gift unspeakable obtain,
and heavenly understanding gain.**
- 3. Wisdom divine! Who tells the price
of wisdom's costly merchandise?
Wisdom to silver we prefer,
and gold is dross compared to her.**
- 4. Her hands are filled with length of days,
true riches, and immortal praise,
riches of Christ, on all bestowed,
and honour that descends from God.**
- 5. To purest joys she all invites,
chaste, holy, spiritual delights;
her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her flowery paths are peace.**

**6. Happy are they who wisdom gain,
thrice happy who that guest retain;
they own, and shall for ever own,
wisdom, and Christ, and heaven are one.**

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

God of wisdom,
Whose knowledge is too wonderful for us,
Who created the world and all that it contains,
Who knows each blade of grass and hair upon
our head,
We are grateful for the part we play in your
vision for creation
And we offer you praise for Your infinite love for
us and our world.

God of parables,
we give you thanks for Jesus,
who brings your wisdom to us through parables
and stories,
through love and action,
through prayer and sacrifice.
We thank you that even when we are not wise
enough to grasp your message,
Your love for us never falters
and your patience with us is unceasing.

God of inspiration,
we thank you that we are not you,
that we do not have to hold all that you hold,
that we have limits and we are limited,
yet you still trust us to be partners in your
creation.

By the power of the Holy Spirit,
encourage us in our journey with you,
inspire us to live for your kingdom,
seeking your wisdom in all we say and do.

We pray all of this in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Let us offer our prayer with all God's people through Jesus Christ our Lord who ever lives to pray for us.

- We pray for the needs of the world...
- We pray for the Church...
- We pray for all in trouble or distress...
- We pray for all who make a new beginning today...
- We pray for ourselves

God of compassion and mercy listen to our prayers in Jesus' name.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**Our Father who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the
glory,
for ever and ever.**

Amen

The Offering & prayer

Though we join in this service online we may well be supporting our home church financially.

Let us pray.

Loving God accept gifts we offer. We pray for you blessing on their use that they may be spent in ways that are in accordance with your ways.

Amen

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 545 – Be Thou My Vision

- 1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou
art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the
night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my
light.**
- 2. Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.**
- 3. Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the
fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true
might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong
tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power
of my power.**
- 4. Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou
art.**
- 5. High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright
Sun,**

**O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever
befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.**

Irish, 8th century

translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931)

versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) (*alt.*)

Dismissal & blessing

Go now from this time of worship. Resolve that your whole living be an offering to God in order that you will be not only hearers but doers of the word.

We go to love and serve the Lord

God our Father, strengthen you,
God the Son show you how to live,
God the Holy Spirit make you fruitful in all you do.

And the peace and love of our God be always with you.

Amen

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StF 689 – Summoned by the God who made us

Delores Dufner, OSB

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StF 706 – Christ be our Light

Bernadette Farrell (*b.* 1957)

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Bible Verses

NRSV & NRSVA

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