

Gospel lesson

We continue in the Gospel of Mark. After last week's text, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain to witness His transfiguration.

When they came down again, the other disciples presented Him with a boy afflicted by an unclean spirit which they could not cast out; Jesus reminded them to have faith, and then, He cast it out, restoring the boy. This brings us to:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-jesus-greatest/>;
credit: LUMO

Mark 9:30-37

(NRSV)

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;

³¹ for 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."

³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?"

³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had

argued with one another who was the greatest.

³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

³⁶ Then 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."

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's time>

<Hymn "Sacred the Body"

TFWS #2228>

Message: In Praise of Women Who Lead



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/uncommon-wisdom/eighteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/eighteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty and perfect God, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may live more perfectly aligned with Your will and share Your grace more fully with all. Amen.

Today we continue in the “Uncommon Wisdom” series,
“In Praise of Women Who Lead”:

“Over the years, Christians have done a good job of heaping historical and cultural baggage onto Proverbs 31, which makes it hard to come to the text with a fresh perspective.”¹

I am the youngest of three sisters (we also had three brothers). My older sisters drove each other crazy, arguing all the time. At one point middle sister spat at the oldest in exasperation, “You’re always right!” to which the oldest retorted, “Well, you’re never wrong!” It became a standing joke: Vicki was always right, and Laurie was never wrong.

Looking up to them, I wanted to know where I fit in. They said I was in the middle: always wrong and never right. I pushed aside their teasing and declared “Nope, I’m just *perfect*.”

<Interactive Time>

A++ 100% ★
PERFECT!

picture from personal creation

Are you perfect? <Let them respond>

What does it take to be perfect? How is perfection defined by the world? <Let them respond>

¹ Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/uncommon-wisdom>.

How do you define perfection (and why)?

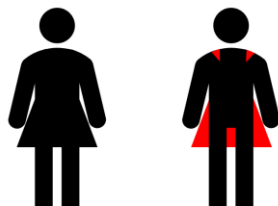
<Let them respond>

Do you know anyone who actually is perfect (besides Jesus)? <Let them respond>

I heard a comedienne talking once about her search for the perfect man. As she went down the list of what she wanted, I thought of my husband and that I have that in him already – good earner, good with kids, cares about me, helps with household chores, and so on. I was tickled to think the perfect man was already taken – by me! Then I heard others say something similar about their spouses.

God made each of us unique. Is there only one form of perfection, or can we all be uniquely perfect? How?

<Let them respond>



*picture from personal creation
based on concept design by
Axosoft #ItWasNeverADress*

In Proverbs, we hear the description of a “capable wife.” Going through the list, I thought of her as: always right, never wrong, just *perfect*. She is the biblical times version of Supermom.



picture from personal creation

Should women be held to the same expectations today?
<Let them respond>

What about men? <Let them respond>

In the reading from Mark today, the disciples were arguing about who was greatest, much as people do today. It seems like everyone wants to be celebrated as more important or more praiseworthy than others. We have various competitions to find the best – the strongest or fastest athlete, the smartest trivia buff, the finest actor/actress, and so on.

What does Jesus say is to be most celebrated?
<Let them respond>

Who, traditionally, has been treated as least, has been made to serve, yet has nurtured the vulnerable?
<Let them respond; note minorities as well as women>

How many of you know we are currently in Hispanic Heritage Month? How about Native American History Month – which one is that? (November) Or Black History Month – which one is that? (February)

So now we have clarified when their contributions to

our country are officially celebrated. But they live among us doing things far more often than that. Do you think Jesus would have us limit their recognition to that timeframe?



background picture from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secretary_of_Defense_Lloyd_Austin_hosts_Morgan_Freeman_for_a_private_screening_and_conversation_about_Freeman%E2%80%99s_documentary_film_on_the_761st_Tank_Battalion_at_The_Pentagon_on_Aug._2,_2023_-_230802-D-PM193-3355.jpg

Morgan Freeman found the idea of designating a month for Black history insulting. He said, "Black history is American history; they're completely intertwined."² The same goes for Native Americans, Hispanics, women, and all other people who have been treated badly because of what they are instead of being treated based on what they do.

Jesus led by example, as a servant leader nurturing and renewing those who sought the Wisdom of God. James advocated seeking the "wisdom from above" for peace in our lives.

For what does sin do? It highlights our wants at the expense of others, who then (at minimum) resent the imbalance and (worse) may seek revenge upon us, driving a spiraling cycle of increasing anger, hatred, and distress – and fear of dealing with the consequences of sin stops us from seeking a way out.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/apr/18/morgan-freeman-says-the-terms-black-history-month-and-african-american-are-insults>

God offers us a better way. God's wisdom guides us to love and nurture instead of resentment or seeking revenge. No one is as perfect as Jesus, but we can celebrate nurturing acts and habits. Just pray for help and you will find out how much the Holy Spirit loves to help us understand.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/uncommon-wisdom/eighteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/eighteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

We can start by listening to what Jesus said and consider the ideal not in physical or monetary terms, but in terms of habitual efforts to help everyone - that includes not helping one get more such that someone else does not have enough.

Where we fall short, we can ask God for forgiveness and help - humbling ourselves to break the cycle of sin with the love of Jesus.

Let the Holy Spirit work - through each of us and through others in complement with us, especially celebrating when those who have been oppressed find the courage to step up and lead. For when we come before God in humility and honesty, God draws near to us with forgiveness and renewed blessing.

By helping everyone to live more fully in the love of God, by praising folks who use their God-given gifts in service as led by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit,

by serving the needs of even the least in our community (as Jesus directed us to do), we build our Christian fellowship and reap the goodness of God's kingdom here on earth.