

Sermon for August 19, 2018

Wisdom

1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14, Ephesian 5:15-20, Luke 24:24-27

The Reverend Roger Pancost

A young pastor named Lydia Sohn came to the realization that she might be wrong about the assumptions she was making about the older members of her church. Wanting to know more about people in their 90's, and the life lessons they have learned, pastor Sohn decided to do a series of interviews. With an open mind, and the promise of anonymity, she began her project.

Pastor Sohn began each interview by asking the person if he or she had any regrets. She discovered that most of the people she spoke with had regrets about family. In reflecting on these interviews, pastor Sohn writes, "They wished relationships, either with their children or between their children, turned out differently. These relational fractures, I could see on their faces, still caused them much pain and sorrow. One of my interviewees has two children who haven't seen or spoken to each other for over two decades. She lamented that this, among all the mistakes and regrets she could bring to mind, was the single thing keeping her up at night."

When those who were being interviewed were asked to recall the happiest moments of their lives, every person recalled the busy times of being in relationship with family members and friends. Even though those times were sometimes stressful, the participants said they were the happiest.

In reflecting on all of the interviews that she did with her 90-something members, pastor Sohn states, "The radical relationship –based orientation of all my subjects caught me by surprise. As someone entering the height of my career, I expend much more energy on work than relationships. And when I imagine my future, I envision what I will have accomplished rather than the quality of my interactions with those who are most important to me. These 90 something-year-olds emphasize the opposite when they look back on their lives. Their joys and regrets have nothing to do with their careers, but with their parents, children, spouses, and friends. Put simply, when I asked one person, "Do you wish you accomplished more? He responded, 'No, I wished I loved more.'"

(Lydia Sohn, July 11, 2018, Medium, <https://medium.com/s/story/what-its-like-to-be-90-something-368780082573>)

The individuals who pastor Sohn interviewed offered important words of wisdom. They shared that what is most important in life is the relationships we develop with other people. This wisdom is also reflected in each of the biblical passages that were read this morning.

In our reading from First Kings we heard the story of Solomon replacing his father David as the King of Israel. As Solomon prepares to take over this important position, God speaks to him in a dream and says, “Ask what I should give you.” Solomon responds, saying, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil for who can govern this your great people.” Solomon seeks the ability to be in positive relationships with the people he is about to govern. He knows that such relationships are more important than great wealth or prestige.

Our reading from letter to the Ephesians begins with the admonition: “Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” The people in the church in Ephesus are encouraged to be fully present to others as they give thanks to God.

In our reading from Luke we hear a dispute among Jesus’ disciples about which one of them is the greatest. Jesus responds by saying, “the greatest among you must become the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves.” Jesus then refers to himself as one who serves. Jesus teaches his followers that true greatness is found in those who serve. It is not about having power and authority over others, but rather about loving and caring for others.

This wisdom is also expressed in the concept of, “Aloha.” Aloha, which is a familiar greeting in Hawaii, expresses feelings of love, affection, gratitude, kindness, and compassion. “Aloha is the sense of peace, beauty, wellbeing, and genuine kindness that comes when we respect ourselves, everyone else and all things.” Living Aloha involves loving yourself and others.

(Ho’omana Spa Maui website: <https://www.hoomanaspamaui.com/the-meaning-of-aloha/>)

As pastor Sohn reflects on the wisdom shared by the elders in her church she writes, “My conversations challenged me. I certainly won’t be giving up my job to hang out with my family more because I also recognize that satisfying careers and financial stability are great sources of fulfillment – which, in turn, affect family well-being. But these different perspectives helped me to focus on what really

matters in the face of competing responsibilities and priorities. The sermon does not have to be the best sermon in the world when my son is starving for my attention. My husband does not need to get the highest –paying job he can find if that means I can spend more time with him.”

No matter what decade of life we happen to be living in, we all need to be reminded of the importance of maintaining good relationships with the people we care about. There is never a stage in life when we cannot love more. And so I invite all of us to think about the important relationships in our lives. These may include family members, friends, co-workers, and the people in this church. Ask yourself:

Is there anyone who could use more of my attention?

How might I let someone know they are loved?

If a disagreement has occurred, how might I help to bring about reconciliation?

Who in my life could use a some tender care?

What responsibility might I let go of in order to focus more attention on the people who are important to me?

Is there a concern that keeps me awake at night? If so, how might I address it?

On a personal note I will share with all of you that as I was working on this sermon during vacation my seven-year-old son came and sat next to me. It was clear from the expression on his face that he needed some of my attention. Not wishing to be a hypocrite, I stuffed all of my papers into a folder and gave him my full attention. That interaction was a reminder that vacations are an important time to connect with family and friends. While the responsibilities of work are ever-present, they are not as important as being fully present.

I now conclude with an insight from pastor Lydia Sohn: this may not be the best sermon in the world, but I hope that it has given you something to reflect on.