



“The Wisdom of Now”

Text: Proverbs 25:11-15

a sermon by Kevin Fleming

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

I don't know if, in all my years of preaching, I have ever constructed a sermon based on one, single verse. I do know that in seminary we were taught to never preach on a single verse, due to the fact that single verse sermons tend to be taken out of their original context in order to prop up some preconceived notion the preacher had about the sermon he or she wanted to preach. Of such sermons it was said, “never let a good sermon get in the way of the Bible.” So, if there is some trepidation in the preacher's voice this morning, you'll know why.

But the single verse on which we will spend some time seems strong. Some of the Proverbs read as though they were printed on the little piece of paper in a fortune cookie. One little line that just holds great truth:

Gray hair is a crown of glory;
it is gained in a righteous life. - Proverbs 16:31

A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. - Proverbs 15:1

Train children in the right way,
and when old, they will not stray. - Proverbs 22:6

And if you, like me, are not a morning person:

Whoever blesses a neighbor with a loud voice,
rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.
- Proverbs 27:14

Each of those could become a sermon and share insight into the way of loving God and neighbor. There is, in each of them, that special sound that rings of good news.

Our single verse for the day is in the same category. Here it is again:

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know
what a day may bring. - Proverbs 27:1

I picked that verse for this Sunday months ago. But, just last week, on my Facebook page, up popped these words:

Retirement age is 67.
Life expectancy is 76.
Work for 50 years to maybe enjoy 11?
Start enjoying life now.
No one is guaranteed tomorrow.

“You do not know what a day may bring.”

Do you ever get the feeling that you spend more time planning the future than you spend in this present moment? The retirement plans consume as much time as we are willing to give them. Child-raising can do the same. Going to school and college can turn into a series of continuous plans for the deadlines that are out there - a few days or a few weeks - and today slips by as filled with nothing more than trials and troubles. Are we ever really present in this moment?

In the practice of Buddhism there is a central teaching. That teaching is entitled, “mindfulness.” The intent of the teaching is for people to be present - in the here-and-now - and not to be distracted by anything else. It is incredibly difficult to do for just a few moments, let alone develop an entire lifestyle based on the instruction.

Yet, we know that we are too often distracted and preoccupied by things that are not in this moment. Right now, you may be thinking about what you will have for lunch, who you will call this afternoon, what you will watch on TV, or what book you might read. Chances are you are a little present to what’s going on in this moment, but the greater chance is that you are somewhere else. I know, because I’m that way too.

In her book, *A Passion for Him*, author Sylvia Day puts these words on her protagonist’s lips:

“Do not wait until life meets some inner criteria to seize the day,” she whispered. “I have learned that sometimes tomorrow never comes.”

Another story-teller put it this way:

“The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ - Luke 12:16b-20

Jesus very probably had heard some variation on our verse for the day. All that worry and preparation and the gaining of more and more that would be there for him “someday.” And “someday” never came. “You do not know what a day may bring.”

This precious gift of life is a fleeting thing. I am keenly aware of the passing of time, as I am reminded every day that my daughters will turn 25 this year. “A quarter of a century,” Lydia told me the other day. It seems like just yesterday we were changing diapers.

We will begin our 24th year together on September 1st. That seems equally impossible. You all have held up pretty well and I’m doing the best I can. But it seems like only yesterday we were unloading the moving van on Southeast Boulevard and Wendy and I carried our boxes of books up to our offices.

Time flies at what sometimes seems like supersonic speed. And in the hustle and bustle of life, we sometimes fail to notice how quickly it is moving. We get distracted, sidetracked, and diverted by things of lesser importance and we miss out on the amazing things happening every day.

I saw this little meme, offered without attribution:

Those who died yesterday had plans for this morning.

Those who died this morning had plans for tonight.

Don’t take life for granted.

In the blink of an eye, everything can change.

So forgive often and love with all your heart.

I don’t know who wrote it, but it is sound advice. Don’t take life for granted. Forgive often and love with all your heart. “You do not know what a day may bring.”

Dr. Wayne Dyer, the popular author and motivational speaker, gives it to us in this way:

Stop acting as if life is a rehearsal.

Live this day as if it were your last.

The past is over and gone.

The future is not guaranteed.

Too often, we tend to think of this life as a rehearsal - a time of getting ready for the next thing. But this life is far more important than a rehearsal. This is the real thing - the performance. It comes to us in 24-hour increments. Life is built day-by-day. Memories are created. Accomplishments are celebrated. Set backs are endured. We are responsible for the stewardship of this life. We are called to make this day - this hour - this moment - count. “You do not know what a day may bring.”

Alice Morse Earle was an American historian and author from Worcester, Massachusetts. Her insights into the things that helped shaped the social order are fascinating. She gave it to us in this rather poetic manner:

Yesterday is history.
Tomorrow is mystery.
Today is a gift.
That's why it is called the present.

Today is a gift. Do we really see it that way? Do we receive the gift, or do we simply believe that it is our right and privilege? Do we feel that today is something we deserve, or do we see it as an opportunity to give thanks and express our gratitude to God and to those who fill our lives with every good thing?

In the cynicism and pessimism and skepticism of our day, it is easy to subscribe to the bumper-sticker philosophy of "same *bleep*, different day." In the partisan partitioning of our country, we seem all too ready to thrive on rancor and resentment, malice and malevolence. Our days seem burdensome. The pandemic has worn us all down and kept us from each other. We simply want to draw the curtains, get in bed, and pull the covers over our heads. A day may hardly seem to be a gift, let alone a blessing.

But each day is a gift - a gift from God. God is the author of life and we are created in God's own image. We are given each day to enjoy, to bring change, to share love and joy, and to ensure that all people everywhere can celebrate the day they have been given. We are called to be change-makers - setting free those who are held in any form of captivity, feeding those with any form of hunger, healing those who are broken in any way, and doing justice for all so that all can be truly free.

Each day is a gift - a present - and we can celebrate that gift each day. Pay attention to the day you have received. Be mindful of what is happening around you and within you. Keep your eyes open to how you might be an agent of positive change and throw yourself into making that change.

Yesterday is finished and gone. Let it go.
Tomorrow is a mystery. We do not know what tomorrow may bring if, in fact, tomorrow comes at all.
Here is today. Give thanks to God and celebrate this day.
"For you do not know what a day may bring."
For now - and for as many days as we may have. Amen.



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