

Call to Worship

Who is wise and understanding among us?

**Those who seek wisdom and understanding
each and every day. Those who delight in God
and meditate on God's law.**

Come, learn more about the wisdom from above,
a wisdom that yields a harvest of righteousness.

O God, your wisdom is more precious than jewels!

We draw near to you. Ministry Matters™ | Worship Elements: September 22, 2024

Hymn

God, who stretched

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1. God, who stretched the spangled heavens
infinite in time and place,
flung the suns in burning radiance
through the silent fields of space.
We, your children in your likeness,
share inventive powers with you:
great Creator, still creating,
show us what we yet may do.
2. Proudly rise our modern cities,
stately buildings row on row;
yet their windows, blank, unfeeling,
stare on canyoned streets below,
where the lonely drift unnoticed
in the city's ebb and flow,
lost to purpose and to meaning,
scarcely caring where they go.
3. We have ventured worlds undreamed of
since the childhood of our race:
known the ecstasy of winging
through untraveled realms of space;
probed the secrets of the atom,
yielding unimagined power,
facing us with life's destruction
or our most triumphant hour.
4. As each far horizon beckons,
may it challenge us anew:
children of creative purpose,
serving others, honouring you.
May our dreams prove rich with promise,
each endeavour well begun;
great Creator, give us guidance,
till our goals and yours are one.

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of all creation,
you have opened the world around us and filled it with beauty and purpose.
Each creature declares your praise –
the mountain states your majesty; the ripened field, your generosity.
Birds flying aloft sing of your freedom;
the tiny ant works with your persistence.
We pray that all our work will honour your justice and mercy.
May all our relationships speak of your compassion.

**God of all creation,
you opened the world around us and filled it with wonder,
yet we confess we look away from its harsher realities.
Our ears can be deaf to cries of need.
Our minds ignore opinions which differ from our own.
Forgive us when we seek greatness instead of goodness,
and miss the wisdom you intend us to embrace.
So may we praise you, O God,
not just in this hour of worship but in all the hours you grant us,
as we follow Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Friend. Amen**

Assurance of Forgiveness

This day the Lord reaches out to you in healing love and compassion.
Receive the blessings which God offers to you.
Be healed and made whole.
Be ready to serve.

[Ministry Matters™ | Worship Connection: September 22, 2024](#)

Scripture Reading Mark 9:30-37

³⁰⁻³² Leaving there, they went through Galilee. He didn't want anyone to know their whereabouts, for he wanted to teach his disciples. He told them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed to some people who want nothing to do with God. They will murder him. Three days after his murder, he will rise, alive." They didn't know what he was talking about, but were afraid to ask him about it.

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was safe at home, he asked them, "What were you discussing on the road?"

³⁴ The silence was deafening—they had been arguing with one another over who among them was greatest.

³⁵ He sat down and summoned the Twelve. "So you want first place? Then take the last place. Be the servant of all."

³⁶⁻³⁷ He put a child in the middle of the room. Then, cradling the little one in his arms, he said, "Whoever embraces one of these children as I do embraces me, and far more than me—God who sent me."

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Afraid to Ask

Questions, questions, and more questions. We live our lives with questions and asking questions. The questions start out simple and innocent, with things like, "Why is the sky blue?" or "Why does a dog chase its tail?" And we can give fun and informative answers to those kinds of things. The depth to which we go in how to answer will be dependent on the age and knowledge of the person asking. But maybe that's how answers are with

all questions... we answer based on knowledge and understanding, our own that of the other people.

Now one cannot assume that there are answers to everything. There are reasons we have scientists, researchers, philosophers, and the like. In many ways each of us are those things based on what we need to learn, but there are people whose professions are for the very purpose of posing and trying to find answers to questions.

We encourage questions. There are unsourced quotes that have become part of our vernacular like "The person who asks a stupid question is a fool for a minute. The person who does not ask a stupid question is a fool for life." Or "The only stupid question is the one that is never asked." Questions feed our learning. It is the natural way for us to learn. Fire and the wheel happened because someone thought to ask can this be done. We are now asking questions about artificial intelligence and how that will impact our world. Our questioning has become pretty sophisticated.

Now, the scripture heard today can lead to many different conversations, topics, and questions, but the place where I landed was with verse 32, "They didn't know what Jesus was talking about, but were afraid to ask him about it."

Afraid to ask Jesus questions.

What is even more interesting is that this portion of scripture started out with the group setting out on a journey and "Jesus didn't want anyone to know their whereabouts, for he wanted to teach his disciples." The purpose of the journey was for teaching and yet the disciples were too afraid to ask questions.

Now we probably should give them a break as they had been witnesses to some pretty extraordinary moments. A few of them were present when Jesus was transfigured in front of their very eyes. The description, "His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. His clothes shimmered, glistening white, whiter than any bleach could make them." (Mark 9:3)

Not only that, but after this experience of Jesus' transfiguration, the disciples had watched Jesus command a demon out of the body of a man. Not to mention already having seen a number of other things that would be difficult to comprehend and reason. To top it off, on this "teaching trip" Jesus starts with the statement that, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed to some people who want nothing to do with God. They will murder him. Three days after his murder, he will rise, alive."

Where the heck did that come from? So not the teaching on a serene and picturesque hillside moment that they may have been looking forward to. This was right out of left field. So maybe avoiding questions was easier than coping with answers to things they didn't understand. Avoidance the answer. In fact, they went into a conversation that had nothing to do with that statement. They landed on a conversation they could get their minds around. Who in fact was the greatest among them?

Now that is something all of us know about. Most of us have had the conversation as children of “my dad is better than your dad.” Or replace that along the years with any other one-up-man-ship that you play. My whatever is better than your...(fill in the blank). Sometimes it is the spoken or unspoken “I am better than you.” And if you think that you haven’t thought that kind of thing, then you need to reflect - which is another kind of questioning. I can bet that each of us has looked at a certain someone and thought we were better than they are.

But I don’t want to get sidetracked on that line of thinking, as relevant as it can be to this scripture as anything. What is the focus for us today is that they were too afraid to ask Jesus what he was talking about. And the sad fact is that though we know that learning comes through questions, so often we don’t ask the questions. The even sadder thought is that the church of all places should be a safe place to ask questions and yet so often questions become muted or shut down. Somewhere along the line we started to believe that the church doesn’t allow for questions and that is tragic!

Over time the church, not just this one, but church in general, lost its wonder and ability to be curious. Some point in church history we assumed that the priests and leaders had the answers and so we didn’t even need to question. Some of the biggest pivot moments in the history of the church were when someone questioned what those in power were doing and why. Take the reformation for an example. Martin Luther was not looking to create Protestantism he was just asking questions and it got him excommunicated. So where in church history the thought that we should not question became ingrained. But, as we see in scripture, questions are hard in the face of unknowns and power.

Jesus came to serve but the disciples still saw him as a leader who was going to overthrow the Roman authorities and help them claim their religion back. They did not understand that truly the kingdom of God was something so different, so far from their experience and imagination that they could not conceive of it. And, no matter what Jesus said or did, they could only comprehend it in light of their lived experience and the history of their people.

Yet they were able to imagine that Jesus was someone different. That is why they were following him. Him promised a new way of being in the world, even if they couldn’t get their minds wrapped around it. But questions were still difficult. They could have simply said, “tell me more about that” or can you help us understand that more fully” yet they choose to move away from the difficult conversation and go to one more familiar.

It seems that is often the way, especially in this last decade but people can’t seem to say to each other, “tell me more about that” or “I am curious about that.” We like to think that somehow our lived experience is the only authentic one in the world. How we experience the world should become the world view for everyone. We tend not to ask, “Why?” Instead, we see power and politics, wealth and prestige as the conversation. One upping is observed in news and elections, and among families and friends.

How little we listen to and learn from one another. We have our opinions and care little of what another is experiencing or the why. Yet the church needs to ask the questions. We need to ask questions to learn, in order to reflect, to help us understand what we may be facing in the now and in the future. We need to ask questions in order to become wise and flexible in our thinking.

Through our learning and questions we can help each other get better answers through cooperation, suspending judgement, and rethinking what we thought we knew. Questions help each of us to see that, just like Jesus and the disciples, we are on a journey of learning...of discovery. We get to be curious.

There is the part in this scripture in which Jesus puts a child in the middle of the room and then cradling the little one in his arms says, "Whoever embraces one of these children as I do embraces me, and far more than me – God who sent me." Now this came after the discussion about who was the greatest, but I wonder if it also can point back to the fact that children are curious, unafraid to ask questions.

Also remember that in Jesus' time children were loved and cared for but they had no standing in society, they were not seen as having any wisdom, knowledge, or something to offer. So for Jesus to say, embrace a child, was to go against all the norms of thinking that surrounded the role of children in that society in that time and place.

So maybe we can let go of some of our know-it-all attitudes regarding life, the church...other people. It has been one of the hallmarks of our New Beginnings journey here at St. Andrew's. Our mantra is slowly permeating everything we do.... let's be curious about that!

It is leading us into new things or rethinking all that has been and changing it to help us be the church in our own time. But this is only part of being curious. We can be curious about the church, about our faith, about ourselves, and most certainly about others, especially those who are very different from who we might think we are or they are.

Let's be curious together. Let's ask hard questions. Let's ask ones that we might think are stupid questions. Ask questions for clarification, for learning, for wisdom and so that we can grow in faith, love, and action.

Let's do it all without fear, welcoming each other's questions, and also what we can learn from each other and those God brings to us or we meet in our community or circles of contact.

Know that Jesus embraces our questions, but more so embraces us. We do it all in the name of the God of love, Jesus who has compassion, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayers of the People

God of all people and places, we come to you in prayer,
giving thanks that you are with us in all situations.

You bring us strength and courage when we are anxious or afraid.

You provide wisdom and direction when we face choices and challenges.
Thank you for your faithfulness to us.

In our prayers, enlarge our love and sharpen our vision
so that we may serve the world you love more faithfully.

We pray for those who dwell on the margins of the economy,
facing the challenges of unemployment, financial insecurity and rising costs.
Give leaders in government, business and labour a mutual vision
that reflects the values of your kingdom,
so that everyone has enough resources and respect to live well and wisely.

We pray for all those facing famine and drought this year,
and for those who have lost everything through fire, storm or conflict.
Bring support to those people and agencies who work to alleviate suffering
and help them rebuild lives and communities.

We give you thanks for those who work for peace and mercy
in a world divided by bitter conflicts,
and for those who keep peace and lead negotiations in international disputes.
Give them wisdom and perseverance.

We remember those who face violence, persecution, or discrimination daily.
Send your Spirit to protect the vulnerable and shame the vicious
so that justice and wellbeing will prevail.

We pray for teachers, students, educational administrators
and support staff as another school year gets underway.

Thank you for the gifts of education,
for deepening insight into this ever-changing world
and the ability to distinguish truth from error.

Grant all those in education this year mutual respect
and commitment to the shared venture of learning.

Help each of us bring the benefits of our education to our life of faith
and give us all a teachable spirit.

Help us to have the courage to ask questions in this community of faith
as well as have the courage and patience to wait for answers
when answers take time and understanding.

We pray for all those struggling with pain or illness,
disability or daunting diagnosis.

Stay by their side.

Be with those who face death this day,
and those who weep for loved ones who have died.

Unite us in love, whatever we are facing,
and grant us the peace and hope you have promised us in Christ Jesus
who taught us to pray together:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Invitation to the offering

Rather than boast of all that we have and are, may we humble ourselves, as we offer our lives, our hearts, and our gifts, in putting others first, that they might discover the wonders of the kingdom of grace and hope. ©2024 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> Sept 22.

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Hymn

Take my life and let it be

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| 1. Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days:
let them flow in ceaseless praise. | 2. Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee. |
| 3. Take my voice and let me sing
always, only for my King;
take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee. | 4. Take my silver and gold:
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose. |
| 5. Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart: it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne. | 6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself and I will be
ever, only, all for thee. |

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Benediction

May you go into the world renewed and refreshed
With humble and expectant peace
To witness to the love of God
The joy of the community of faith
And the hope of new life in Christ. Amen.

[After Pentecost 18B - September 22 - United Church of Christ \(ucc.org\)](http://www.ucc.org)