



Sermon Notes

15th August 2021

Balerno Parish Church

By Rev Dr A J Groenewald

Reading: Psalm 119: 9-16

Sermon

Today's Bible reading is a Spiritual lesson Which I think is quite apt as all learners and teaching staff who will return to school in the coming week...

A teacher once explained to her class that there are lots of different living organisms on earth, and what their scientific names are. Finally she came to people. She asked: "Can anybody tell me what WE are called?" A wee boy's had shot up in the air straight away. "I know, Miss," he said. "we are vegetables!" When she gave him a puzzled look, he said: "We are human BEANS!"

This week all the youngsters will be going back to school, but that doesn't mean that today's message is only for them – because there is an expression that says: "you are never too old to learn", or "everyday is a school day".

And that applies to our spiritual lives too. In actual fact, learning from the Word of God is something we should never stop doing... We are God's children and everyday should be a "back to Sunday school" day!

One example is the Pandemic, which I guess was to many people a big learning experience not only learning new skills but grasping how God is indeed at work, changing their lives for the better and transforming them Spiritually to appreciate the wonders of life.

There are many other examples where life is indeed a big classroom with God as the Perfect teacher and our fellow pupils our brothers and sisters in faith. Like any other schools, we also have our favourite and less favourite lessons. We also have different skills, gifts and talents, all learning differently. Some learn by more practical lessons while others seem to ponder more on the theories behind each and every event. In Spiritual terms you can say some Christians learn by accepting events while others like to question the reason behind events. At the end of the day, we are all learning, trying to figure out what God is teaching us.

In any school setting there is time to have sufficient breaks so that learners can socialise and learn from other pupils by engaging in conversation. But it also provide time for pupils to release some happy hormones through laughing and relaxation. This is also a vital part of any Spiritual learning. Fellowship in any part or form is vital for our existence as believers - Something that all of us missed the most during the Pandemic.

Just like any learning experience, we are often put to the test to see how much knowledge we have retained about God's great saving plan - not only in Biblical times but also today. Often we are in situations where we do not know why bad things are happening or when it will stop. But we have the knowledge through several references in our own lives and from the lives of people in the Bible, that God is with us and that He holds out lives in His hands. Although our circumstances may not change overnight, we do know that God has our best interest at heart. We know this because He saved us all through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

In the Psalm the writer asks an educational question namely: how can a young person keep his way pure? In today's language we can rephrase the question by asking: how can a person manage not to go off the rails?

Interestingly, although the questions may be different the answer is still the same namely by observing or following or listening to God's Word.

So what can we learn from Psalm 119?

This is the longest Psalm in the Bible, consisting with 167 verses. Explaining in detail how not only young people, but all of us, can "stay on the path of purity"; or in today's terminology: "prevent our lives from derailing".

Interestingly enough, this is not only said in the words of the Psalm, but also in the way it was written.

In the original Hebrew, this Psalm is an acrostic poem, with every line of each stanza starting with the letters of the alphabet – a technique deliberately used by the author to focus on the perfection of God's word, indicating that although our lives may sometimes be upside down and difficult to understand, we have one certainty, and that is the Word of God.

God's word is like the train tracks of our lives – no matter how many ups and downs we experience, or how unpredictable the road ahead may be, as long as we stay on the tracks, we'll be able to keep going.

In other words: As long as we are obedient to the words of God, we will be fine. The thing is just: you can only be obedient to the word of God, if you know the word of God and when you practise applying it in your everyday life.

And that is why we should never stop learning from and about it...

But it is also not only listening or observing God's Word but also making it practical in everyday life by reflecting on it.

It is amazing that today there is a lot of emphasis on reflective practise as a central part of learning, something that the Psalmist expressed a long time ago.

So what is reflective practise? According to Donald Schon "Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions so as to engage in a process of continuous learning. A key rationale for reflective practice is that experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning; deliberate reflection on experience is essential."

"A person who reflects throughout his or her practice is not just looking back on past actions and events, but is taking a conscious look at emotions, experiences, actions, and responses, and using that information to add to his or her existing knowledge base and reach a higher level of understanding."

The Psalmist is reflecting on his actions of seeking out God, and of expressing his joy in knowing God and his commands. In verse 15 he deliberately says that he "meditates" on God's direction and look out for God's way.

I wonder how many of us are still constantly reflecting on our faith in the Lord God, thinking of how much we do God's will and seeking out God's way for our lives?

To be gaining knowledge about God by studying His word is clearly not enough. We need to bring it into practise like the Psalmist said, by keeping God's word

in our hearts so that we do not sin against God and stray away from His commands. It is also vital for any Christian community to practise fellowship. Fellowship provides so many opportunities for us to engage with others, speaking and witnessing God's intervention in our lives and indeed expressing our joy in serving God with one another. But it also provides an opportunity to share our grief, struggles and brokenness with others, emphasising the fact that "A burden shared is a burden halved." (T.A. Webb)

God is encouraging us this morning to study His Word, the BIBLE as often as we can, to reflect on its meaning, to seek fellowship where we can share the joys of learning more about HIM with others and to always seek His will in everything we do, say and think.

So yes with the opening of schools fast approaching in the coming week, may we never lose sight of the fact that we too are part of a Spiritual school which never shuts. May we indeed, through the help and guidance of God's Holy Spirit, always learn something new about God and His ways by reading, reflecting, and studying the Bible. The Bible is no use to us when it is just gathering dust on a bookshelf! You won't ever know how to do maths, if you do not open the handbook. In the same way, we have to READ the Bible and LIVE accordingly to what God is saying, in order to know the will of God!

Amen