

**Service for Cashmere Presbyterian Church - Sunday 17 May 2020**  
**From one Generation to Another**  
**Rev Hamish Galloway**

**Call to Worship**

Listen to your father, who gave you life,  
and do not despise your mother when she is old. (Proverbs 23:22)

**Hymn**

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;  
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
who wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,  
though the eye made blind by sin thy glory may not see,  
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,  
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea;  
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

**Prayer of Praise and Confession**

Heavenly Father

We have come here today to worship you, source of all love and grace, creator and sustainer of the universe.

Let us put out of our minds all the cares and worries of the week and those things that make us anxious and afraid, so that with joyful hearts we can bring to you our praise and thanks.

We thank you for the coming of Jesus Christ into our world; for the new teachings he brought that changed the old order, teachings that have come down across the ages to our own time to challenge our actions and beliefs.

We thank you for his death and resurrection and the promise of eternal life.

We thank you for the beauty of soft, slow autumn, the calm seas, the colours in the trees, and the renewal of bird song.

We thank you for our friends and family and all the joy and laughter we share with them.

And as we worship you, Oh Lord, we are conscious of the many ways we have failed you. Forgive us for the times we have been filled with anger and bitterness, forgive us for the times we have been too concerned about money and material possessions, forgive us for those secret things for which we are ashamed.

Help us to live in unity with those around us, and in this time of great change, help us to be

generous in our dealings with others, respecting other points of view and using them to enlarge our vision.

These things we pray in Jesus name. Amen<sup>1</sup>

**Reading:**

Proverbs 4

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction;  
pay attention and gain understanding.

<sup>2</sup> I give you sound learning,  
so do not forsake my teaching.

<sup>3</sup> For I too was a son to my father,  
still tender, and cherished by my mother.

<sup>4</sup> Then he taught me, and he said to me,  
"Take hold of my words with all your heart;  
keep my commands, and you will live.

**Sermon: Generational Wisdom**

Since last week's sermon I have been ruminating even more on the story of my great grandmother surviving the harsh winters of Saskatchewan with 4 children and snow up to the windows. I originally thought of this story because of an article I read that called us to think back to how our ancestors had coped with times of trial in order to find help and wisdom for coping with the current crisis. But last week I did not tell you the end of the story ... last week I finished by saying that after successive harsh Canadian winters they decided to immigrate once again, this time to a parcel of land in Owaka, South Otago. But the story does not end there. On the sea voyage to NZ my papa got swindled out of most of his savings by a con man. And then he lost his Owaka farm in the great depression. He moved to Dunedin with a horse and cart from the farm and began to deliver milk to the hill suburbs. He did that for many years and became a well-known identity in the city so that when he died there was an obituary in the ODT headed up 'the whistling milkman'. That story feeds by soul, my spirit, my resilience in times of stress. That after so many setbacks in life he was still able to bring joy to others as he went about his business! That is wisdom that comes to me down through the generations. This is the topic today, based on the strong call in Proverbs for the generational transmission of wisdom.

The reading today is part of a bigger section, chapter 1 to chapter 9 of the book of Proverbs where there are 10 speeches from a parent to a child following the pattern of exhortation, lesson, and conclusion. These 10 speeches are interspersed with 4 poems where 'Lady Wisdom' expounds on an aspect of deeper transcendent wisdom.

This is all part of a recurrent theme of Proverbs: that it is vital the lessons of life are transmitted from one generation to the next! It comes in encouraging tones

<sup>3</sup> For I too was a son to my father,  
still tender, and cherished by my mother.

<sup>4</sup> Then he taught me, and he said to me,  
"Take hold of my words with all your heart;  
keep my commands, and you will live.

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<sup>1</sup> St Helliens Presbyterian Church

But also with an overtone warning of the folly and danger of getting this wrong.

Proverbs 30:17

<sup>17</sup> “The eye that mocks a father,  
that scorns an aged mother,  
will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley,  
will be eaten by the vultures.

A vital part of the transmission of wisdom in the Hebrew Scripture is the importance of passing faith in God down from one generation to the next.

I have a story that illustrates this so well. It is a story that the family concerned is happy for me to share with you because it has such an important message. Just recently I was involved in a family meeting around the funeral arrangement for a lovely Christian woman who was dying of cancer. Her bible was so important to her. It went into her bedroom at night, was read before she went to sleep and then came out to the lounge during the day where it was read as part of her daily devotional life. As the family talked about final things, one daughter said to her mum ‘that bible is so special to you mum. Would you like it to go into your coffin with you?’ To which the mum rose up indignantly to retort ‘certainly not, I want you to have that bible and I want you to read it’.

It was a cry from one generation to another, ‘do not let this Christian faith die with me!’

And yet right now the older generations of Christians in this country are facing similar problems to Cashmere, where the church has a largely elderly and declining congregation. The older ‘builder generation’ has held the church together for decades but they are fading out and the younger generations are only sparsely represented in the traditional churches. There is an excellent book that traces this trend in the Western World written by the French sociologist of religion Daniele Hervieu-Leger, [Religion as a Chain of Memory](#). The book talks about the way faith is transmitted from one generation to another creating a chain of belief. That chain has remained intact for thousands of years and yet the book also traces the break in that chain in contemporary times as the Baby Boom generation and their children have drifted away from Christian faith in large numbers. There are lots of reason for this, too many to go into in a sermon. I have written a paper on this topic if you are interested. You can access a copy at <https://knoxcentre.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/2015-Jun-Galloway-H-Hope-Springs.pdf>

The key point I make though, is that the transmission of the wisdom around faith in God has weakened dangerously in our lifetimes. What can we learn from the book of Proverbs that might help to reverse that trend? Let’s unpack our reading for today and see what it teaches verse by verse:

1. Appreciation of Generational Wisdom  
*Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction;  
pay attention and gain understanding.*

This is about developing in the younger generation a desire to seek out the wisdom of the older generations. When it happens it is a very special thing. Can you remember times when you had an interaction with an older person that has stayed with you, memorable and impactful?

Coming to work at Cashmere has stirred up some memories like that in my mind. John Martin was one of my youth group leaders. His thoughtful and honest approach to faith had an impact on me – that is a good memory. And Alan Simson was present when, as a teenager, I preached my first sermon. His enthusiastic encouragement also had an impact on me, I remember that. And he wrote me a reference for my first job as a young lawyer. He wrote that reference with great care and eloquence, and again I remember how encouraged and strengthened I was by that.

It is such a rich thing when the young actually seek out the wisdom of the old! The night before my dad died I sat with him in hospital with my nephew Jonathon. We sat with dad as he lay there unable to respond, yet hopefully able to hear something of what we said. And Jonathon talked to me about an interview he did with dad, his Pop, about the lessons in life he wanted to pass on to his grandchildren. Jonathan wrote that interview up. He called it Lessons from Pop. In amongst the words of wisdom was this interchange:

*If you had the chance to pass on one message to your friends and family that you would like them all to take away. What would you say?*

*Based on my family life it would have to be: go to Church.*

*My family would have been nothing to what they are now if they didn't go to Church. It's not so much having the faith, it is knowing what is good and what is bad. You learn this through the bible. So long as you have this it keeps you on the straight and narrow.*

*Now none of my family has run into trouble. They all have the rules of a good life that come through the church. I enjoy Church and I learn something every Sunday. My faith increases every Sunday. I'm not a great pusher of religion, I can't go out and preach to other people, but it is inside my heart that I have it.*

As Jonathan and I reflected on Pop's wisdom here, he spoke to me about how this was provoking him to explore the spiritual dimension of life. This is a story of a chain of faith being kept intact from one generation to another.

## 2. Removing the Barriers

<sup>2</sup> I give you sound learning,  
so do not forsake my teaching.

There are barriers that separate the generations! The old can say of the young things like: they are so busy, they never really listen to me and their values seem to be all wrong! And the young can say of the old that they are out of touch, they don't really listen to my point of view, or they go on a bit, they can be so boring! But the worst thing that the young can say of the old is that 'he or she is an old fool'. I certainly do not want to be an old fool! Verse 2 of the passage seeks to remove that barrier by calling us to pay careful attention to the sound learning and teaching of God in our lives. This is about retaining the disciplines of bible reading, sermon listening, prayerful reflection, small group discussion. These disciplines so sharpen our Godly wisdom and reduce greatly the chance of becoming old fools!

My mum was one who kept these disciplines all her life and developed a God wisdom that strengthened her in life's struggles and also inspired me in my journey. I remember when I was about 10 being sorely tempted by the grapes growing over the fence at the back of our local church. I and a friend gave in to this temptation. We jumped over the fence and brought back over a lovely haul of grapes. We were busy eating them when the minister

came around the corner, catching us red handed. He said to us, I will not do anything as long as you go home and tell your parents what you have done. I found mum in the kitchen doing the dishes and quietly confessed my sin. She did not react immediately, then of all things she burst into song! It was the old hymn:

Yield not to temptation  
For yielding is sin  
Each victory will help you  
Some other to win ...  
Ask the saviour to help you,  
Comfort, strengthen and keep you;  
He is willing to aid you,  
He will carry you though.

That was a wise response borne out of years of faithful church attendance. And it is a response that stays with me to this day, informing the way I face the inevitable temptations of life.

### 3. Relationship is vital

<sup>3</sup> For I too was a son to my father,  
still tender, and cherished by my mother.

This provides a picture of a loving home. Loving homes are fertile beds for the transmission of wisdom from one generation to another. Relationship is a key element of our learning. When we think back to school days it is the good teachers we remember, not necessarily what they taught us. And research is clear that there is so much more chance of developing sticky faith in a child at home than there is at Sunday School.

There are some lovely passages in Deuteronomy that bring out the importance of relationship in transmitting wisdom from one generation to the next. In Deuteronomy 6 we read:

*<sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

This is about adults who have a heartfelt and contagious kind of faith in God that is naturally communicated in all of life's interactions.

But there is also an element in this Proverbs passage that promotes the mutual sharing of wisdom from young to old. It is not only one way. There is a lovely word in this verse that brings out this mutual aspect: 'cherished'. I love that word – it means to hold someone dear. When we are cherished, we are taken seriously and listened to. Often time it is true that wisdom comes from the lips of babes! Jesus knew that when he called us to have the faith of children, he knew how easily we can complicate life and the wisdom of a child like faith. I certainly take much delight in hearing the thoughts and opinions of the younger generations in my family! To listen carefully to them is the beginning of good dialogue.

### 4. Wisdom brings life!

<sup>4</sup> Then he taught me, and he said to me,  
“Take hold of my words with all your heart;  
keep my commands, and you will live.

Ultimately the book of Proverbs is full of tips on how to live life to the full! And a key part of it is to draw from the wisdom of those who have gone before.

The challenge for the people of Cashmere Presbyterian is finding ways to connect younger generations to the ancient biblical wisdom about faith, hope and love that has sustained us for generations. This passage inspires us to:

1. Know how important this message is
2. Ensure we get wisdom ourselves
3. Develop the loving relationship that makes transmission natural
4. And be witnesses of the lifegiving nature of faith

The parish council and I have been talking about this. A strategy group led by Peter Nelson has been thinking on this for some time. As a group we are really motivated to find ways for the fantastic insight and wisdom that exists in the Cashmere congregation to be shared with and inspire new generations. We are working on a vision statement and a strategy to do that. We are excited by that challenge. We invite you to support this renewed vision with a desire to do what you can do to help us work with God to breath new and younger life into the lovely stone church on the hill!

### **Prayer of Intercession**

God of all generations, you have called us to keep the faith and to share the faith with those who come after us. We acknowledge too the failure to do this well in the Western World in recent years. Be with us as we rise to this challenge. Keep us faithful to your timeless message of grace in changing times. Give us patience when there seems to be a lack of response from many in younger generations. Comfort us and encourage us when we feel despair in our aging and declining congregations. Particularly be with the Parish Council and the people of Cashmere Hills Presbyterian as we seek your will for our future and work with you to make that a reality. Give us the courage to try new things and the imagination to dream up new visions for the way church can be for a new generation.

And we pray for our world. Wherever we are, we can find opportunities to stand with people, and identify with their needs, their fears and their hopes.

Lord God, we need the healers and the peacemakers right now. We pray particularly for doctors, nurses, medical researcher, psychiatrists and counsellors - all those whose job it is to help heal the hurts of mind and body. May their hands and words be full of your love. We pray too for the peacemakers - for those, and thankfully there are many, who rise above their own hurts and prejudices to work with the 'other side' for peace and understanding. There is much dispute and debate in the world right now. People are anxious and many are angry. Communities in some places are confused about what is right and divided about what to do. We pray for leaders and those with peace keeping roles in these communities. Give them courage and understanding, and a discernment to know your way ahead.

We thank you God of love and justice for all these people who have taken your command seriously to love others just as you have loved us.

Amen.