

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“*Learning Our Lessons Well*”**

Psalm 19

**Rally Day
Presentation of the Catechumens**

September 13, 2015

Well, I’ve got some really good news for you. Since we have so much going on this morning, I’ve decided to keep this sermon really short. In fact, it may be the shortest sermon I’ve ever preached as your pastor! Can I get an “amen” to that, people? Can I get an “*amen!*” Don’t say I never did anything for you!

But, just because the sermon is short, it doesn’t mean that it’s not still important. Because, on this Rally Day, and this Presentation of the Confirmation Class day, and this day when we honor our wonderful Sunday school teachers... I want to make the point that, as Christian disciples, *learning* is critically important.

And, when I say *learning*, I mean learning the Scriptures; and I mean learning the ways and the expectations of Almighty God; and I mean learning how to love our neighbor as ourselves; and I mean learning as much as we can about following our Lord Jesus Christ. And I also mean what we might call “secular” learning; the learning that we do in school, and in our jobs, and through the various experiences that come our way in life. Science, math, English, literature, psychology, the arts, and so on; anything that helps us understand the world that God has made, and our place in it... is important, and good, and meaningful. So, when I say that learning is important, I mean *all* learning... whatever and wherever it may be.

One of the hallmarks of Reformed Theology, of which Presbyterianism is a part, is the importance of education... and learning as much as we can about all aspects of life and faith. And so we properly emphasize it, and celebrate it, and prioritize it... here at church, and out there in our workaday world. As St. Anselm famously put it way back in the 11th Century, our faith is always seeking understanding; we want what we believe to make sense, and to satisfy our minds... and we want to understand how our lives fit into the larger picture of God’s providence and creation.

And so, we study, and we learn, and we think, and we reflect. We familiarize ourselves with the Word of God. We do our best to understand the historic teachings of our faith. We try to figure out what it means to live authentic Christian lives in our twenty-first century world. We do all of that so we can grow in our faith; and mature in our discipleship; and be more effective in our witness for God’s kingdom; and live each day with the full wealth of conviction, which comes from being part of the family of God. And that’s why learning is so important to us... as followers of Jesus Christ. And that’s why we make such a big deal out of the educational enterprise, as we kick off our new church year, for 2015-16.

This was the main point of our Scripture lesson this morning, from the Psalms, in which the Psalmist reminds us that building our lives on the foundation of a good understanding of God and His ways is the key to a joyous and meaningful relationship with the Lord. Hear again what he says:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

“The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

You see, from the very earliest days of Israel’s relationship with God, the importance of knowing Him, and understanding Him, and learning about Him and His ways... was emphasized over, and over again. Even though they made a lot of mistakes, and had a lot of misunderstandings, the people of God were relentless in their efforts to deepen their knowledge of who God is, and what God is like. It wasn’t just a hobby for them, something they pursued in their spare time; it was the driving principle of their life. And that emphasis, that crucial need to learn, and to know, and to understand... has carried right through to our own day and age. And to our church family this morning!

So, as we make our way into this new church year, I want to encourage each and every one of us to make sure that we “learn our lessons well!” I want to challenge us to make education, and especially Christian education, a priority in the weeks and months ahead. I want us to overcome any inertia that tells us that we already know all we need to know about our Lord and our faith. If you signed up for our Bible-reading challenge, got started, and then ran out of steam... rev up your motivation, and get back into the game! If you haven’t signed up, it’s still not too late to do so. Start now... and even if you don’t finish the whole Bible by the end of the year, carry it over into next year and keep the momentum going.

There are going to be opportunities for adult education here at First Presbyterian as we go through the year; if you can work it into your schedule, come join us in one or more of them! Do you have a particular interest that you would like to see covered in a class? Let me know! I’ll try to make it happen! Read! Study! Think! Reflect! Explore the things that interest you! And realize that in all these ways, we are making ourselves available to the Lord to teach us about His ways, His world, and His will for us. And that’s a big part of what being a Christian is all about!

So, are you ready to learn some lessons this year? And learn them well? That’s our calling for the year ahead; let’s make it our personal quest!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!