

WB Friends Meeting for Worship  
6-14-20,  
Sue McCracken, Pastor

“Learning from our Ancestors”

Like many of you, I really like to read....always have, probably always will. My kids grew up in a home where reading was important (maybe happens in many families, especially if there's an educator in the house) and I think they all still enjoy reading when work and family allow. My two daughters are both copy editors and indexers, and my daughter-in-law also indexes, mostly medical books. So I hope my grandkids will continue to love reading because that's the way we formalize our ideas about ourselves, and our lives, and how we can learn from all our ancestors who have gone before us..

Most of my reading of the printed words these past four years has been to help me become more informed about spirituality and the history of Christianity.... From which I have thoroughly enjoyed and learned a lot. But my 'reading' for pleasure is mostly done with audio books while on my daily walks. Recently I was out of books I had reserved to read, so I went to the 'recently added' section and ran across an Amish story that I thought might be entertaining (I don't want to do too much thinking while walking, but I do like to stay engaged in the story – makes the walk go faster)!

As I've listened to a couple more books set in Amish communities, it has had me thinking about these people and how totally different their lives still are today as they seek to maintain a much simpler life of hard work, family, and their religious beliefs. And I wondered what I might learn from them. Turns out I can't really agree with some of the spiritual 'truths' that are espoused in these books, and in some ways, there's a type of holiness code in their communities, too, which includes shunning for going against Amish beliefs. But there are definitely times when my life could be a whole lot simpler if I quit buying 'stuff' that I don't necessarily need, quit eating out so much, etc. The Amish communities are just one of the ways we can learn from some of our ancestors.

Then this week I read another article about an ancient philosopher who lived over 550 years before Jesus was born, and I was amazed at some of this

ancient man's deep thinking that often paralleled some of the same things Jesus talked about. So I want to share some of this man's thoughts, but I'm not going to tell you who he was until the end of the message to see if you can figure out his identity!

Here's the first quote:

***The man who asks a question is a fool for a minute, the man who does not ask is a fool for life.***

I remember one of my friends talking about her Sunday School classes as a child and asking her teacher why she believed what she was telling them. My friend said her question was immediately dismissed, and she got the impression that asking questions about God and religion was forbidden. But, fortunately, my friend has continued to ask questions about beliefs for her entire life and is one of the most spiritual people I know. And you know my thoughts on asking questions, so, I liked this saying.

Did Jesus' teachings say anything about asking questions? Quite simply, Jesus modeled the importance of asking questions; scripture records Jesus asking 183 different questions, but only answering 3. I'm not sure what that says about us pastors who do most of the answering and not so much questioning.

Here's the next bit of wisdom from this ancient philosopher:

***Respect yourself and others will respect you.***

Does this sound like anything Jesus said? It reminds me of Mark 12:31 when Jesus says of the two greatest commandments,

***"The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"***

The outer selves we present to others is ***always*** a reflection of our inner worlds. If I feel insecure and worthless on the inside, that's how people will probably see me and treat me. If I truly believe that I am created in God's image, I know I must respect myself, love myself, and love my neighbors in the same manner.

Some suggestions for those of us who may struggle with that loving and respecting ourselves challenge, include starting a thank journal, meditating, and practicing proper [self-care](#), where we take time for ourselves regardless of the demands on our time from work and family. There are so many ways we can strive to make ourselves feel better.

Here's the next philosophical suggestion from this ancient man:

***It does not matter how slow you go as long as you don't stop.***

This is a REALLY hard one for me! I don't know how many times I've been told 'you just go too fast' and I know it's probably true! The ego in me seems to want to see everything as a competition!

I remember a time in 6<sup>th</sup> grade when our teacher gave us a pie chart wheel with spaces for six wedges. Each time we read something from a different genre (poetry, fiction, non-fiction, etc) we got to put that wedge on our pie wheel that was on the bulletin board in the back of the classroom. And, of course, I wanted to have mine full before anyone else in the class. Some of the kids could have cared less about getting the task completed, but not me! I'm sure I never really enjoyed anything I was reading because I was just too focused on being first.

Sadly, I still rush through things at times, and rarely does it help. And I see this with kids who are used to playing a lot of video games where you get instant gratification, usually the faster you can make the characters move! But one thing I've discovered when working with students, is that when problems occur, causing these students to struggle with a task, they simply want to give up.

I always liked to share the story of Thomas Edison with those students who struggled and just wanted to give up when the task was challenging. Edison's teachers said he was 'too stupid' to learn anything. He was fired from his first two jobs for being non-productive. But would Edison have discovered the filament that would allow a current to light a bulb if he hadn't tried – and failed – 1,000 times? When a reporter asked Edison how it felt to fail a thousand times, he replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention of 1,000 steps."

Paul, in Galatians 6:9 echoes this idea of never giving up when he wrote:

*“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

This next ancient saying should cause us to pause and think about – our thinking!

**“Your life is what your thoughts make it.”**

I’m reminded of Paul’s words to the church at Philippi when he encouraged them to guard their thoughts: Philippians 4: 8-9a

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

Let me stop for a minute and think about this one....what were my thoughts when I first woke up this morning? Then before coming to worship? How about the last thing I thought about before going to sleep last night? Were my thoughts true? Noble? Pure? Lovely? Oh, probably none of the above. But I can understand the wisdom in this saying.

Last week I talked a lot about compassion....so were any of my thoughts the last 24 hours considering ways I can show more compassion? Maybe a tiny bit when listening to the news and seeing the continued protests, but not nearly enough. Mostly, this morning I was thinking about this zoom worship and how I wanted to make sure I had everything lined up, highlighted, had contacted those involved, sent the right emails.....you probably know how it goes when your mind gets consumed by your work.

Jesus also knew that our thoughts make us who we are. In Matthew 15: 10-11 he told his disciples:

*“Listen to what I say and try to understand: You aren’t made unholy by eating non-kosher food! It is what you say and think that makes you unclean.”*

Sometimes it's really hard for me to remember this wise tidbit, that our lives are what our thoughts make them!

Here are a few more bits of wisdom from this ancient philosopher:

### **"If You Hate a Person, You are Defeated by them"**

We know Jesus said we were to love our enemies in Matthew 5: 43-45a:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."*

Just like love, hate is a powerful emotion within us that gets triggered; but it also indicates a deep relationship because we wouldn't hate if we could let it go and ignore it. Perhaps each time we feel that extreme dislike toward another person, we could take a look inside ourselves and then start asking questions about the person – what would it be like to live in his or her shoes? What was his/her home life like? Was he or she abused growing up? Oh yeah – once again it's about compassion, the same kind that Jesus modeled for us.

And this pretty simple one:

### **"He Who Chases Two Rabbits Catches None"**

If you've ever raised chickens on the farm to eat, and then you were the one to have to dress and cut up the not so pleasant fowl, you totally understand the statement, "quit running around like a chicken with its head cut off! Simply trying to do too much can lead to not really fully accomplishing what each task requires. This was often me while working full time and raising four kids with a husband who was also working full time while trying to farm the land. We probably would have been better off trying to slow down our lives a little, but sometimes in the midst of just trying to survive, we forget the importance of not chasing too many goals at the same time.

And finally....who said, **"Do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself?"**

If you're thinking this is something Jesus taught, you would have been correct since in Matthew 7:1 it's recorded that his words were:

***"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."***

But *"Do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself?"* was also said by this other philosopher who was born 551 years BEFORE Jesus.

So have you figured out who this ancient philosopher was who wrote all these things I've mentioned today - teachings which also parallel Jesus' and Paul's teachings? If you said the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius, you're a very well-read person because I would never have guessed he was the author. Confucius championed strong family loyalty, respect of elders by their children, and husbands for their wives, as well as what we refer to as the [Golden Rule](#).

Please don't imagine I'm suggesting we start following Confucianism, the Amish ways, or any other ancient religion. But to think Christianity is the only faith with any wisdom and value is just failing to learn from those who have gone before us and left a legacy worth examining. I follow Jesus' teachings, but I also want to learn from other faiths and other wisdom teachers to help me live fully, love wastefully, and be all that I can be!