

Church Picnics at Camp Milan: The first is July 12



This Sunday at 4:00 p.m., all are invited to a church pot-luck and grill out. We will be grilling hamburgers and hot dogs, and need everyone to bring a dish to share and some friends. This is a great opportunity to introduce someone new to the church family and get to know some folks you've only seen on a Sunday morning. Come to Camp Milan Retreat Center at 12905 13th Street, Milan.

QC Methodists Gathering July 16

On Tuesday, July 16, staff and volunteers from the QC United Methodist Connection will come to Two Rivers for another picnic/potluck. At this event, the clergy of the various churches will each bring a crock pot of beef barbecue (or a vegetarian chili option). This is a chance for the church leadership to strengthen our connection. The clergy are particularly interested in hearing from others about how we can cooperate as a Quad Cities United Methodist Church.

QC Youth Leaders on August 6

On August 6, the Quad Cities Connection Youth will come together to plan the year together. A few youth will be invited to participate in this conversation.

BIBLE IN 52 WEEKS - WEEK TWENTY FIVE

In this daily reading plan, there are four readings, one each from the Torah, Prophets, Writings, and New Testament. Every day will take about 10 minutes in total. If you follow this plan you will read the entire Bible in 52 weeks and the Gospels twice.

Sun (Jul 12): Deut 30; Isa 36; Prov 28; Phlm 1
Mon (Jul 13): Deut 31; Isa 37; Prov 29; Heb 1
Tue (Jul 14): Deut 32; Isa 38; Prov 30; Heb 2
Wed (Jul 15): Deut 33; Isa 39; Prov 31; Heb 3
Thu (Jul 16): Deut 34 ; Isa 40; Ruth 1; Heb 4
Fri (Jul 17): (Completed); Isa 41; Ruth 2; Heb 5
Sat (Jul 18): (Completed); Isa 42; Ruth 3; Heb 6

PASTOR'S NOTES

TORAH: The death of Moses and transition to Joshua, here ends the Torah portion of our year through the Bible. For continuity's sake, consider starting into Joshua after this.
PROPHETS: Hezekiah is a great reformer who shows what good leadership could look like. Unfortunately, it's too little, too late. Isaiah 40 starts a shift that many consider to be Second Isaiah, when the exile has begun God's tone shifts to comfort.
WRITINGS: We return to describing Lady Wisdom and the famous Woman of Proverbs 31. This is a song of praise for what women do, not a list of demands for women to do.
NEW TESTAMENT: Hebrews is one of the most inscrutable books of the NT. It is difficult to understand without knowing about Second Temple Jewish worship practices.



SERMON RECAP

JULY 5, 2026

The Wisdom of Lament and Complaint
“Alexander and the Horrible, Terrible, No
Good, Bery Bad Day”
Ecclesiastes 7:14-20; 9:7-12

The book choice for this week is pretty polarizing. “You mean, ‘Alexander is a brat?’” One friend said when I told her we were reading “Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day,” by Judith Viorst. Another said, “Oh, I liked that book when I was a kid. I guess I just related to him having jerky older brothers.”

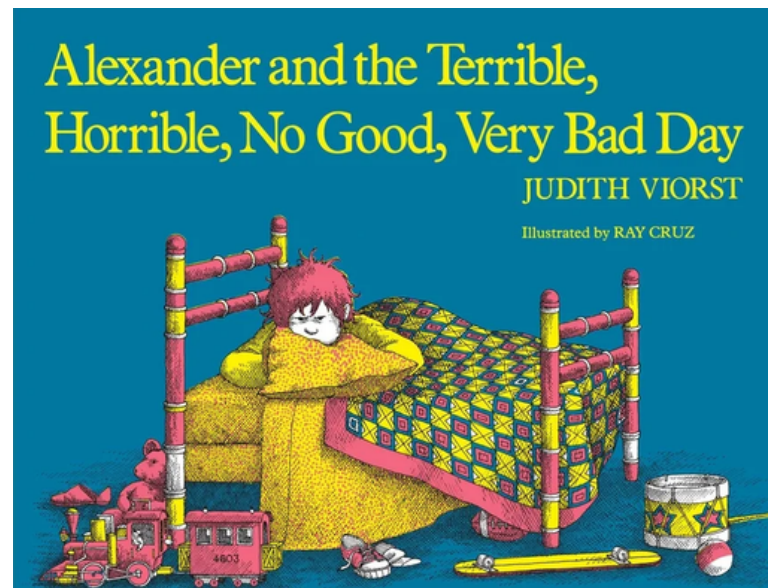
Honestly, I think the same can be said of the book of Ecclesiastes. Robert Alter, a great scholar of Hebrew and author of an incredible Hebrew Bible translation and commentary, said, “[Ecclesiastes] is in some ways the most peculiar book of the Hebrew Bible.” The whole of Ecclesiastes can be summed up with its most-often used word: “Pointless.” More traditionally, the word is “vanity.” Other translations make it “meaningless.”

Ecclesiastes is a book about the pointlessness of life. The protagonist spends his life looking for meaning. “The Teacher” (Ecclesiastes is Latin for Teacher) sets out on a journey for meaning. He looks to education, pleasure, work, wealth, status, legacy, righteousness, even foolishness, and finds none of them answer the question of meaning. In the end, we all die.

If we pursue justice and righteousness (as the Proverbs calls us to do) we realize that the wicked often prosper and that justice does not always prevail. If we pursue work, we become weary, and success simply breeds envy. No matter how much we produce, it will never be enough. If we pursue wealth, legacy, or reputation, we find that it is all just passed down to our next of kin, and who knows if they will deserve it? In the end, everyone is forgotten and memories fade.

There is an element of Ecclesiastes that feels deeply depressing, but there is another side to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. The word that is translated in various ways: vanity, meaningless, pointless, is the Hebrew word *hevel*. It can more literally translated as smoke or vapor. As Robert Alter points out, it is the breath that is exhaled, invisible except on a cold night. Even then, it is seen for only a moment before disappearing into the night.

This is why Alter translates it to “mere breath” because it is the opposite of *ruah*, which is life-breath. Ruah was a



part of Creation. It is the breath of God that animates all living things. It is the breath into the *adama* that made us human. We are given life-breath. And when we exhale, we breathe out *hevel*.

The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes is that life is meant to be spent. Life-breath is meant to be exhaled. “The race doesn’t always go to the swift, nor the battle to the mighty, nor the food to the wise.” The best thing we can do is hevel - exhale. We can’t hold our breath hoping that something will give that breath more meaning. We have to exhale it - hevel - vapor. Get everything you can out of every breath because the entire point of living is exhaling.

Alexander was angry over all the bad things happening to him, but the wisdom of his mother was that bad things happen everywhere. There’s nothing we can really do to avoid them. Just live tomorrow and hope it’s better.

But on this Communion Sunday I want to remind us that there is some sacred about our hevel - the smoke that rises and seems to disapate. Our hevel rises up to God - this is the same hevel that rises up to God when there were burned offerings. The process of burying offerings to God was that the hevel would rise up to God, who would be pleased by the aroma of the hevel.

In our Communion liturgy we declare that “we are a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us.” Our hevel is our breath, and it rises up to God. Communion is an act of joining with Christ. We eat the bread and drink the cup, and we are united with Christ - but every breath we take is a “holy and living sacrifice.” Every time we exale our hevel rises up to God, so “Go, eat your food joyfully and drink your wine happily because God has already accepted what you do.” (Ecc 9:7)

NEXT WEEK:

The Wisdom of Women, “The Paper Bag Princess”