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Worship Theme: Perspective

Call to Worship:

We are finishing our worship theme of Perspective with a service filled with great advice. On the one hand, I'm excited, because I have some GREAT advice for you. We are all going to be so successful and effective after this service as we implement all this topnotch advice. But, I'm a little worried, because there is really nothing worse than unsolicited advice. In fact, Gandhi said he thought one of the most prolific forms of violence is giving unsolicited advice. Yikes. I will take your presence here as an implicit request for advice. And, the best part of advice is that you can take it or leave it. As they say, your mileage may vary—take what works for you and leave the rest.

Deane Davis, former governor of Vermont, said his advice was “Read something every day; write something every day; nurture a relationship every day; and keep moving. If you keep moving they can't bury you. That's illegal.”

So let's keep moving with “Woyaya.”

Reading:

There are a lot of poems about advice, but I landed on this one because it was not written by a poet at all.

It's by a lawyer I met during sabbatical travels named Matthew Bolon. His mother had died of cancer a few years before.

And tragically, less than a year after his mother died, his young wife also died of an aggressive cancer, leaving Matthew alone to raise their toddler daughter.

Matthew spent a few years in a haze of grief, surrounded by, as he put it, the ruins of his once-beautiful life.

After a week in Ireland, inspired by the advice of a local bartender we happened to see every night, he wrote this poem. So imagine a tall glass of your favorite refreshing beverage in front of you—for Matthew it was a Guinness. Here is:

“How to Drink a Proper Pint” by Matthew Bolon

Drink deep, drink deep.
Take the full measure
into the gullet
of your weather-worn heart.

Let muddiness settle
as the darkness rises to the brink
foam over
 flowing.

But do not sip timid.

Do not allow bitterness
to despoil cool refreshment
into lukewarm regret.

Instead bathe your tongue
in the full-bodied tears
of yesterday's griefs.

Permit yourself
to swallow all your sorrows.

Open your throat
to unanswerable questions—
Gulp its mysteries whole.

And know that the glass you drink from is already Broken—

with a crack
yet to reveal
itself.

Drink deep, drink deep.
For you too are going to die.

Sermon: The Best Advice I Ever Got¹

Drink deep!

I would never have imagined that advice on how to drink a Guinness

could also be advice on how to seize the present moment with joy and gratitude even in the midst of grief and pain. But I think the Irish have known that those two things go together for a long time.

The advice I'm offering you today mostly comes from you. I asked on Facebook "What is the best advice you've ever received" and got over 100 responses! There were two pieces of advice that seemed inexplicable. One friend advised, simply: "Don't live by a river." She does, in fact, live by a river.

Another advised ominously: "Don't show up to a wake alone and 30 minutes early." Unfortunately that is basically my job so I have flouted that advice many times.

But, consider yourself warned.

So now I will offer you advice for:
being true to yourself; a bad day;

¹ Advice offered in response to my facebook post on January 10, 2020, or via email.

Other advice and thoughts on advice found here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/21/smarter-living/how-to-give-better-advice.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/smarter-living/best-advice-youve-ever-received.html>

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/ennslu/what_is_an_important_piece_of_advice_you_can_give/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=ios_app&utm_name=iossmf

advice for dating, partnering, and parenting;
advice for dealing with haters and facing your fears;
advice for how to get along with people
and advice for when to stop trying;
advice for work and for living a good life.

Advice for being your true self, expectations be damned:

Hill Snellings' Uncle George told him: "Think for yourself!"
James Herzig echoed Socrates: "Know Thyself" and added
"Follow Your Heart."

Others said, "trust your gut" and "do what you think is right."
My painting teacher Emily Passman countered that with "Don't
believe everything you think."

The daughter of Brad and Anne Howe, Katie Bender, who
wrote: "Put on your damn bathing suit and jump in the pool."
She explained that what she meant was, people hold themselves
back from the fun, joyful activities they want to do because they
are worried about how they look or what other people think.
But sometimes we still have bad days. Here is:

Advice for a bad day

Rachel Hyde suggested this, from writer Anne Lamott: "Step
outside and look at the sky."

Colleen McDonald said, "Take a shower, get dressed and see
how you feel." Thanks mom.

Gordon Hardy and Betty Ruth both offered variations of: “Feeling sorry for yourself? Go do something nice for someone.”

My kids will agree that when someone is feeling bad I always offer water. I think being well-hydrated helps everything.

Many people had:

Advice for dating and partnering

I’d say the most specific advice for a happy partnership came from Nick Hart, who said “Marry Ann Bobo.” That has worked for him but our options are limited. Maybe Ann has some single siblings.

A good friend, Allison Jordan told me the best advice she ever got was that “a good guy is not the same as the right guy.” And that the right long term relationship is not necessarily someone who sees politics the same way or shares your hobbies, because so much more of your life is going to be about the mundane.

Who picks up the kids, brings the dog to the vet, etc. So pick the person who you can share THOSE parts of your life with, who is willing to do all those things. Allie remembers dating guys who were into hip restaurants and indie music. But then she started dating, quote “the cranky older guy who generally hated concerts and clubs and whose best Saturday nights were spent watching movies at home with his dog.”

And that guy was the guy for her.

My husband Ben's grandpa Leon gave him this advice and gentle warning for dating: "A leopard doesn't change its spots." I've also heard this advice phrased as "When people tell you who they are, believe them."

When moving towards a big commitment, Jack Donahue advises: "Start loving your mother-in-law even before the wedding."

Ellen Hilsinger passed on this lovely advice from her mother, given on the eve of her wedding: "Love is a delicate flower that needs regular tending: water and sunshine daily, and protection from harsh winds, lest it wither from neglect." That simple metaphor has stuck with her, now married almost 35 years. Someone else suggested a different key to a happy marriage: "Never iron his shirts."

Susan Johnson wrote this advice: "One love does not diminish another." That advice came from a minister who was helping Susan cope with her future husband's concerns over loving Susan as deeply as he still loved his late first wife. Susan writes: "How true and what a wonderful second marriage we both had."

Advice for parenting:

Marriage can sometimes lead to babies. So here is some advice for parenting.

Starting with pregnancy, the best advice came from my friend Allison Jordan, who said, "Ignore everyone's advice and do what works for you." Yes.

One family friend with four kids, before they had their first kid, was told: “Remember, the baby is joining your family, not the other way around.”

Anne Norris, a teacher at Lesley Ellis School wrote: “Onesies are replaceable. Don’t kill yourself trying to get the impossible stains out. They’re not worth the effort. Save it for the important, irreplaceable, items. Life is short.” Such a good metaphor for doing what matters and not sweating the small stuff.

Christopher Walters shared a saying among friends when his kids were little: “Never try to make a happy baby happier!” Meaning they’d invariably mess it up and make things worse. Jane Current shared this advice for parents of young children: “Remember, the kid doesn't know that you don’t know what you’re doing.”

But sometimes, we can’t avoid the drama. So here is some advice for

Dealing with Haters

A friend from Divinity School said “What other people think of you is none of your business.”

Alison Streit Baron said: “Don’t judge your insides by other people’s outsides.”

Ching Lai added to that by sharing what a high school mentor told her as a teen: “Don’t compare yourself with others. Instead, compare yourself to who you were yesterday.”

A friend and colleague, Rev. Kate Wilkinson reminded me of some advice we got at some point in our ministry training: “You’re never as good as they say you are and you’re never as bad as they say you are.”

Kate also had advice for when you are facing a crossroads: “If you are excited and scared about something at the same time, that is a sign you should move forward with that thing.” And speaking of

Facing fear

Carolyn Kingston advised, “Step into what looks scary at first.” An old friend said her father told her, when she was nervous to make a big career change, “Brave people aren’t fearless. They do it in spite of the fear. Take the risk.”

Facing our fears can be the first step on the path to

Achieving our dreams and goals

As Kate Bromley wrote, “When an opportunity presents itself don’t be afraid to take it. Take the leap and the net will appear!” My friend March Ang gave the advice that’s been saving the universe since 1980: “Do. Or do not. There is no try.”

But when it comes to achieving goals, sometimes we have to navigate difficulties in the workplace. So here is some

Advice for work

My sister offered some advice that apparently my dad gave her: “Everyone is replaceable. Business is business.” She said that has helped her feel less bad when she’s quit jobs to seek new opportunities, because she knows that they’ll find someone else to do the work. (I don’t know if she’s ever met Sarah Garner though. Pretty sure Beyonce wrote the song “Irreplaceable” about her.)

My sister in law advised that when you are making a job change: “run *towards* something, don’t run *from* something else.”

Sarah Jackson offered some of the best work advice ever, “Blame the process, not the people.” Basically, people are quick to blame other people for problems that happen at work, but all too often the real problem is the process, or the system or institution the process lives in. If a process works well, most good people can succeed with that process. But a bad process can pull the best employees down. Fix the process, not the people!

My friend Pam who serves in the Air Force offers her best advice for dealing with bureaucracy: “Never accept a no from someone who can’t tell you yes.” All right, Maverick!

My friend Kelly said the best work advice she ever had was right after she got her dream job and then messed something up.

Her work partner said “I’ve been here 30 years and still make mistakes. Never be afraid to ask for help.”

Along the same lines, my colleague Rosemary Lloyd said “Don’t suffer alone.” This pertains to personal and professional situations!

So much of our personal and professional life is learning

How to get along with others

Many people suggested variations of Think before you speak! Don’t hit “send.” Pause before you respond. Wait 24 hours before acting. And a friend advised: “Use the gap between thought and action wisely. It can be life altering.” In that waiting time you might decide to do or say nothing, or as one friend quoted Queen Elsa, “Let it Go!”

The advice I give all the time is “Email is for sharing information, not emotion.” Sometimes it is better to just talk in person, or at least, on the phone.

A number of people also advised to assume goodwill—assume that others have positive intent. But when someone’s positive intention—yours or someone else’s—is received differently, Maggie Herzig advises: “when you notice that there has been a gap between intention and impact, consider it to be a teachable moment—an opportunity to learn.”

Several mentioned a version of the Golden Rule—treat others as you wish to be treated. And to stay humble, a friend of mine

says her dad taught her to “always remember that I am no better, or no worse, than anyone else. I’ve just had different opportunities.”

Isham Peugh learned a variation of this life lesson in Boy Scouts; I’ve heard stated a few ways and attributed to many different people: “People will not remember your awards, degrees, or how much you earned. They won’t remember what you said or did. They will remember how you made them feel.”²

And finally, one of the best ways to get along with people, especially people you might live with: “It costs nothing to say thank you.”

But sometimes, we’ve been trying too hard to get along with others, and we have to figure out when it is time to step away. A number of people had advice for

How to stop trying to get along with people.

A scholar friend from Divinity School offered this Hungarian proverb: “Either get used to it or get lost.”

Another person said they had a family member continuously not giving them what they expected or needed. They were given this advice to manage their expectations: “Stop trying to pull water from a dry well.”

² <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/04/06/they-feel/>

Maureen Mulhern said she is still learning to avoid unnecessary drama by saying “Not my circus; not my monkey.” A UU minister colleague Rev. Cheryl Walker added “one monkey don’t stop no show.”

Rev. Sarah Stewart gave advice that is so simple, true and hard to remember: “You cannot make people do things.”

And finally, let’s go big picture. Here is

Advice for living a good life, and appreciating your life while you have it:

My mother in law quoted Aunt Mame: “Live! Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving to death!”

Tempering her extravagance, Trapper Markelz and others said “Everything in moderation”—advice that apparently many people’s mother’s gave them.

My colleague Jake Morrill said: “What’s important is not which decision you make. It’s how you live with the decisions you’ve made.”

Vivian Montgomery shared that a dear teacher once told her “don’t skim the gauzy surface of life; choose laying down roots over making tracks.”

Another one from Ben’s Grandpa Leon: “If you have five good friends over the course of your life, you’ve done well.”

Jeanne Hobbie reminds herself “Life is not a dress rehearsal.”

An old friend and Chris Walters both had the same saying: “Don’t wish the time away.” Every stage has unique joys and

pains. If you wish the pains away, you miss out on the joys too. And finally, an old friend Stacy Collins remembered treasured advice from her late father, who died when she was in her early 20s: “Go easy.” She wrote, “every time I was rushing, leaving the house, heading back to school/work/ apartment/life after seeing him, his signature closing on every phone call was “go easy, Stace.” Now that he is gone, she writes that she now reminds herself of this daily. She writes, “pursue goals but go easy into them instead of being fear-ridden or rushing with immediacy or urgency... go easy on others—be gentle, kind, open... Go easy on the smash of life and deadlines and meetings and activities and mental load... Go easy on yourself, try to not let the monsters of self-doubt or inadequacies win... His mantra is a great philosophy to approach life.”

How to sum this all up!

Take what is useful and leave the rest.

Drink deep, my friends, and don't wish the time away.

Take a leap and ask for help.

Assume goodwill, stay curious, and say thank you.

Don't press send.

Go easy. Go easy.

Put on your damn bathing suit and jump in the pool.

May it be so, and Amen!