

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“FAITH AND REASON”  
Matthew 25:1-13  
November 9, 2008  
11:00 AM Service**

Throughout our lives we receive many things from other people. We inherit our looks from our parents. We gain knowledge from our teachers. We receive happiness from our family members and friends. Some of life's most important things, however, cannot be given to us by others. We must generate them or earn them for ourselves. We have earned the right to embrace the power of possibility.

The Christian faith has always had opposition. Jesus encountered enemies everywhere he turned. Between the religious leaders in Jerusalem and Rome's occupying forces throughout Palestine, Jesus knew little peace. Beginning with Canaanite fertility cults and Greco-Roman mystery religions, the Christian movement's greatest opposition for centuries came from rival religions. Then, with the dawning of the period known as the Enlightenment, reason became the most formidable enemy faith had ever faced. This conflict still exists in many quarters today.

**“Enlightenment”** was a term for the rationalistic, humanitarian, and scientific thought that broke out in the eighteenth century. This period is sometimes called the Age of Reason. The scientific and intellectual developments of the seventeenth century fostered a scientific and rationalistic approach to nearly every human concern, especially political and social issues. American founding fathers, such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, were greatly influenced by the insights and the spirit of the Enlightenment. The U. S. Constitution is considered a representative document of the Age of Reason. The light of human reason dispelled centuries-old superstitious and inhumane forms of governance and social organization. We all owe more to the Enlightenment than we may realize.

On the other hand, reason proved to be a wonderful servant but a poor master. When human reason becomes the measure of all things the world is reduced to a very small and very flat reality. Many of the things most essential to human life and well-being are not amenable to reason. Logic can neither prove nor disprove the reality of love, for example. Rational thought can help us out of all manner of difficulties, but it is inadequate to explain why one musical composition is profoundly moving while another sounds like a five-car pileup. Reason's argument against faith is that it is irrational and its claims are not subject to scientific verification. Human reason is a good thing, but has serious limitations.

Common sense is universally praised, even though it sometimes seems to be so un-common! The philosopher Descartes said common sense must be the most widely distributed commodity in the world, because **“every man is convinced that he is well supplied with it.”** What is common sense? It is not opposed to reason, but recognizes its limitations. Common sense is not reason, but it is reasonable. It is practical knowledge for living. Common sense is practical wisdom.

Jesus had a high regard for what we call common sense. Many of his parables present common sense as a function of faith. He told of a wedding where ten maidens had the happy responsibility of meeting the groom and escorting him to the ceremony. Because this meeting was at night, the maidens had lighted torches. The groom was delayed and the maidens fell asleep. At midnight they were awakened by a shout, **“Here comes the groom!”** The torches had been burning so long that now they were flickering and about to go out. Five of the maidens, using common sense, had brought an extra portion of oil, just in case. These were the **“wise”** maidens. The **“foolish”** maidens missed the ceremony.

Jesus was talking to his disciples about being prepared for God to act, even though they did not know *when* God would act. This kind of preparedness is simply good sense. Faith often involves common sense, as do most things. The nineteenth-century biologist T. H. Huxley said that **“science is nothing but trained and organized common sense.”**

Some people today reject religious faith because it **“doesn't make sense.”** Certainly some expressions of religious faith do not make sense. Some are simply nonsense! Snake-handling as a test of faith falls into this category. Some expressions of religious faith, on the other hand, may be

altogether reasonable. We can be intellectually honest and still live by faith in God. Both the ancient law and Jesus call for loving God with our minds, as well as with our hearts and souls. The human mind is a part of our creation in the image of God. We are to practice a stewardship of the mind as well as of our material possessions. Honest doubt is not a sin. It is often said that doubt is the growing edge of faith. Repressing our doubts is unhealthy and dangerous. H. A. Williams says, “**All fanaticism is a strategy to prevent doubt from becoming conscious.**” (*The True Wilderness*)

We have only to look just beneath the surface to see that biblical and Christian injunctions concerning what to believe and how to behave are well grounded in practical wisdom. The Ten Commandments were not given to the Hebrews to make their lives burdensome, but to make their lives happy and good. The concern that we acknowledge the sovereignty of God is not the arrogant demand of a jealous deity. It is only as God is the center of everything that human life is meaningful and fulfilling. Jesus’ commandment to love, not just our neighbors, but our enemies sounds like the epitome of idealism. In fact, it is the only effective strategy for dealing with enemies. It is not idealistic, but reasonable and sensible. These are examples of the uncommon sense of faith. Faith, as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, incorporates the best of what is called common sense. But faith also extends the range of our perceptions, deepens our understandings, and transforms our hearts and minds. Such faith is reasonable and makes uncommonly good sense.

Someone saw an automobile license plate that read: “**BSA MOM.**” BSA stands for Boy Scouts of America, and a proud mother is probably driving the car. The Scout Laws teach respect for authority, consideration for others, and reverence for God. But at the heart of this organization is the Boy Scout Motto: “**Be Prepared.**” Foresight is the foundation of good citizenship, strong character, and a hopeful future.

Faith in the future is not the same thing as the naïve belief that everything will turn out alright. We are responsible for making plans and provisions for the future. The saying goes, “**God helps those who help themselves.**” This is the place where we have open hearts, open doors and open minds. I would love to be your pastor, to help you exercise your responsibility in preparing for your future. I would love for this to be your church.