

Sermon 9-19-21

Paul Purdue preaching

Wisdom and the Way of Peace

Wisdom shouts in the street; in the public square She raises Her voice.

Above the noisy crowd, She calls out.

At the entrances of the city gates, (where the Patriarchs pontificate) God speaks. She says: "How long will you clueless people love your naïveté, mocking insight and hating knowledge?"

Look, God speaks, She says: "I'll pour out my spirit on you. I'll reveal my words to you."

(adapted)

Holy Wisdom, Sophia, God speaking in female form calls out to us offering a proverb. She begs us to get a clue, leave our naïve thinking, seek insight, and to love knowledge. God speaks; She rebukes the clueless, naïve, mockers of understanding, and haters of knowledge. Sadly, some people of faith seem to separate faith from reason. Like Galileo's critics, they reject any scientific insights that challenge their sense of Biblical truth. They mock new insights unironically on their smartphones. They see faith and reason as radically different spheres. Faith and reason belong together. How can God speak to us or guide us outside of our thinking?

In Matthew 1, Joseph is engaged to Mary but somehow finds out that she is pregnant before marriage. Joseph knows the law literally demands Mary be stoned to death. But being a righteous person, Joseph didn't want to even humiliate Mary. Matthew tells us, "As Joseph was thinking about all this, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, 'don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit.'" We might focus on the angel's command, the dream, or Joseph's thinking. The Bible does not sharply separate these things.

"What do you think?" Jesus asks in Luke 13. In Matthew 17, people blamed one group for a tragic tower collapse, but Jesus invited deeper thinking: "What about those eighteen people who died? Do you think that they were more guilty than others?" Seeing a temple tax booth, Jesus asked Peter, "What do you think?" Who benefits here? In Matthew 18, Jesus compares Almighty God to a shepherd asking, "What do you think? If someone had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, what should the shepherd do?" In Matthew 21, Jesus invites us to consider if creeds matter more than deeds asking, "What do you think?" And telling a story about a farmer asking their two children to help with the harvest. One child agrees to work but does nothing. The second says "no" to God but spends their life taking care of people. Which life honored God? What do you think? How do you think about faith without thinking?

The Apostle Paul asks us to "think about what I'm saying," (1 Corinthians 10) while 2 Timothy 2 adds "think about what I'm saying; the Lord will give you understanding about everything." Faith and reason belong together. Wisdom loves knowledge and seeks understanding.

Fifty years ago, Dr. King warned, "Religion has all too often closed its eyes to new discoveries of truth (insight, love of knowledge) . . . so, many new truths, from the findings of Galileo to the Darwinian theory of evolution, have been rejected by the church with dogmatic passion. The historical criticism of the Bible is looked upon by the soft minded as a blasphemous act, and reason is often looked upon as the exercise of a corrupt faculty which has no place in religion. All of this has led to the widespread belief that there is a conflict between science and religion.

But this isn't true. There may be a conflict between soft-minded religionists and tough-minded scientists, but not between science and religion. Their respective worlds are different, and their methods are dissimilar. Science investigates. Religion interprets. Science deals mainly with facts; religion deals mainly with values. The two are not rivals. They are each other's complement." (Martin Luther King's *Strength to Love*)

In the tenth grade, I was finally catching up with my classmates and took AP Biology. Every week we had at least one lab experiment where we drew a picture of a flower or some specimen and labeled all the parts. Mr. Gentry introduced us to Dr. David Attenborough's wonderful PBS videos about evolution. A few of my church youth group colleagues began praying that I would not lose my faith and encouraged me to drop out of what they labeled as a sinful class and dangerous class. I had never thought that our biology lessons or the concept of evolution contradicted the scriptures. Seven days is not the point of Genesis 1. Genesis 2 tells a different story where God plants a garden and makes humans from the mud. Four decades ago, my church friends' genuine concerns introduced a false division between science and faith. Is not our God, who engineered an adaptive self-sustaining system as worthy of our praise as a God who made a world in six days? What kind of Creator only receives praise for the starry night if the worshipper professes belief in a six day creation? Is not our deepest wonder enough praise? Is not our Love of knowledge, a kind of praise to the Creator of our minds?

Science and faith go together. Wisdom requires both. Scholars tell us that King Solomon set up a school of wisdom in Jerusalem modeled after those universities set up in other ancient near east capitals. As Solomon took the throne, Solomon sought God's guidance, spending the night at the great shrine in Gibeon. Indeed, when I am troubled I will come in and kneel or even lay down in our sanctuary looking at our stained glass windows. The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream saying, "Ask whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you." Solomon answered, "Here, I am Lord, your servant. I'm in the middle of this vast population of people, so please give me a discerning mind to govern your people." It pleased the Lord that Solomon chose wisdom. Solomon awoke and realized it was a dream. And yet, dream or not, God gave Solomon wisdom and great understanding - insight as long as the seashore itself. So the royal historian toots the king's horn noting that Solomon was wiser than anyone... Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol, Darda, or anyone in Egypt or to the east, speaking three thousand proverbs and writing one thousand songs. What is wisdom? Solomon speaks of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop growing in the city wall and animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. Solomon built a huge shipping port on the Mediterranean Sea. Solomon made extensive trade alliances all over the known world. Some ships stayed at sea for 3 years arriving with cargoes of gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. (1 Kings 3-10) Biblical wisdom is biology, botany, agriculture, economics, literature, and song writing: Arts and Science degrees. Be wise: seek insight, love knowledge and understanding!

Wisdom is not limited to spiritual matters or defined by literal adherence to Bible verses. The righteous like Joseph, Mary, and Jesus know this. So when James or the Apostle Paul speak of two kinds of wisdom, they are not separating faith and reason, but naming two sets of values, ethics, and practices. The wisdom from above is deeply rooted in our treatment of others-in ethics and humanity. Wisdom treats others in the way we long to be treated, loves one's neighbor as yourself, and even Jesus' more challenging wisdom: loving your enemies, praying for your opponents, and forgiving 490 times.

James asks what is the source of your thinking? What is the key to your decision-making? What values do you pray into reality every morning and measure your day by each evening? Can both

fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? Can a fig tree produce olives? Are any of you wise and understanding? Show that your actions are good with a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom. The wise live wisely, ethically, and compassionately.

The wise do not live for money or power but seek to care for others. This seems foolish to some worldly people. (1 Corinthians 1) Love is the key value and ethic behind wise decisions from the Bible to business. Wisdom calls out “if you have jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, then stop bragging (about your faith) and denying the truth by the self-centered things that you do! The unwise dabble in lusty motives, unspiritual calculations, and devilish pay-back cycles. Selfish ambition produces disorder and evil.” The cross seems deeply foolish to those who measure life by power over others instead of love given freely to others.

But can we make a rational argument for loving our neighbors instead of ruling over them?

- Well, if I want more love in the world, then I must add love to the world.
- If I want justice in the world, then I must add justice to the world and oppose injustice.
- If I want peace in my world, then I must work for peace, not violence.
- If I want to be honored by kind neighbors, how can I reasonably expect others to offer to me what I will not give to them? If I expect to be heard, must I not learn to listen?
- If I lament hypocrisy, judgment, or meanness, how can I tolerate these within me?
- What do you think?

How does James describe the wisdom from above? First, it is pure, and then peaceful, gentle, humble, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine. Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts. Wisdom is seen by good works and good life. Wisdom gives birth to gentleness and humble living. Wisdom is pure, peace-making, gentle, willing to yield, filled with mercy and good fruits or actions, without a trace of partiality/favoritism (racism/ classism/ sexism/ homophobia) or hypocrisy. Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts.

This morning we passed out lovely colorful and fuzzy cloth toy grapes, mangos, and apples to the children during a special outdoor Communion service for families. “Wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, growing a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.” Dear ones, what will we grow with our lives? What will we sow into our world? What will we cultivate with our time? Will we live for our selfish ambitions or seek to plant peace, mercy, a willingness to yield, and justice into this world we all share? What do you think? Let us be wise, loving knowledge, living ethically and making peace. Amen.