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Wisdom...

There is an ubiquitous human desire to be considered wise, isn't there? Don't all of us yearn to be more than just knowledgeable but to be considered wise in this world? But what is it to be wise? And how do we differentiate between being merely knowledgeable and being truly wise? We might say that to be knowledgeable is akin to being well informed. In modern times, we are recipients of many facts, figures, and theories. Indeed, we live in an age of great knowledge, of data. We have more access to information than any previous generation. Even more information and facts than we can possibly synthesize.

But, with all this knowledge, are we wiser? It is the application of information that we take for wisdom, isn't it? It is one thing to know something. It is another to allow that knowledge to shape one's life for the better. I may know, for example, that Jesus said to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love my neighbor as myself. That's fine knowledge in and of itself. But it is in the actual living of those words, and through the experience of that living, from whence true wisdom comes, isn't it? It is there that one truly incarnates the love of God and where we gain insight into God's very nature.

Our Lord speaks of the wise person, as the one who builds their house upon rock (Mt 7:24-25). He says that those who hear his words, and put them in practice, are these wise souls. I like this metaphor and find broad application of the analogy to many circumstances in life. I.e. to build our "house" upon rock, is to base our lives upon that which is firm, solid, true. In this case, we build house upon our faith that, "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:11), and that by living by his teachings and the example of his love in our own words and actions, we show ourselves not only to be disciples but to be wise.

From a biblical perspective, we hear of wisdom as being based in the "fear" of the Lord (see Job 28), by which the text generally means something closer to awe, absolute awe of God's greatness, power, holiness, righteousness, and goodness. Wisdom is associated with not just knowing God's commandments but putting them into practice (as noted above). Wisdom is also often associated with greater age, which makes sense. Those blessed with many years have had the benefit of much history and experience upon which to draw. But this is not exclusively so.

When Jesus' family had gone up to the Temple for the Passover festival and were then on their way back home, they discovered that he was missing. They'd already traveled a day's

journey! Anyway, they return to the city, only to find him in the Temple, sitting among teachers asking questions. And those teachers were astounded by his “understand and answers,” that is his wisdom, of God and God’s ways, and he was at that time not even a teenager. We often also say, when we encounter a particularly insightful young person (which they all are at times), that they have “wisdom beyond their years.”

I’m sure you have never had this experience. But sometimes I look at a work that I’ve wrought, or consider something that I’ve said to someone, and I have thought to myself, “how could someone with so much knowledge - as yourself - do (or say) something so incredibly “unwise”? Usually, another word would fill in for “unwise.” It is during such reflection that I’ve realized that my impatience or arrogance has led the way. Almost always, in my busyness, what’s happened is that I’ve failed to wait upon the Lord. I’ve acted hastily and unwisely, instead of allowing my actions or words to reflect my beliefs, my values, my love.

Of course, being wise is kind of like being humble, in that, if you claim to be either, you probably aren’t. And writing on the subject of wisdom is a dangerous pursuit, for it only shows one’s own limits. But most of us are probably wiser now than we were earlier in our lives. We grow in wisdom, when we set our hearts upon it, when we seek it. God teaches our hearts. In scripture, few people get more credit for being wise than Solomon. It was said that the whole world came to hear his wisdom (1 Kings 4:34, 10:24). But Solomon didn’t just start out that way. He first had to seek wisdom, from the Lord. He prayed for it. The story goes something like this.

When Solomon succeeds his father, David, as king, how goes to worship God. That night, he has a dream, and God says to Solomon in that dream that he can ask God for whatever he wants (how about that, what would you ask for?) Well, Solomon asks for wisdom, wisdom that he might serve God rightly and rule his people justly. And God is so pleased with this prayer that he grants it. God points out that Solomon didn’t ask for the life of his enemies, or for great riches for himself, or any of the things that people more often seek. Solomon doesn’t even ask for a long life for himself. “Just make me wise,” is all he asks.

And this delights God (read the full story at 2 Chronicles 1:1-13). Perhaps it is a good prayer for us too. In the moments, when we don’t know which way to turn. When we are unsure of the faithful course of action. Even when we have all the facts and figures and information, but we are still struggling with which way reflects God’s love. Maybe it is in those moments when we pause and say, “God grant me just a little bit of wisdom now. I want to please

you. I want my words and actions to reflect your love.” I believe the result will be a people that truly does show itself to be wise.

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,
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