

Who wouldn't want to be wise? It is certainly not our goal in life to be known as a fool. But lady wisdom seems to have trouble in our reading from Proverbs this week, convincing people that wisdom is the better way. We know that it is the class clown that gets all the attention, not the studious person. At work those who scoff and criticize get more attention than those who quietly go about their work.

This morning, continuing my discussion from last week, we're talking about wisdom. We'll look at the wise king Solomon, what the letter of James has to tell us, and about the shocking wisdom of Jesus.

Today instead of singing a psalm, we sang a portion of the Wisdom of Solomon, a lesser known book found in the Apocrypha of the Bible. King Solomon lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, but this book, written in Greek appears to have been written around the time of Jesus. The writer makes it seem as though Solomon is the author but he is not.

But it makes sense to use Solomon's name on your book of wisdom. Because King Solomon was known as **The** Wise King. He was King David's son. He was the King who built the Temple in Jerusalem. He was the king who asked God, not for riches and for power and fame, but asked God for wisdom. God was pleased and told him, "Indeed I will give you a wise and discerning mind." God also, by the way gave Solomon long life and riches and success against his enemies.

But because God doesn't just give us a gift, God also gives us opportunities to use the gift, God gave Solomon situations in which he had to be wise. Hence comes one of the most famous stories about Solomon and his wisdom.

There were two women who brought a baby with them and came before King Solomon because they had a terrible dispute. Each woman claimed that she was the mother of the baby. One of the mothers had lost a baby and now both were claiming that this remaining one was theirs. Each mother told her tale to the King and Solomon could not tell who was telling the truth. It was a classic she said, she said case. So Solomon told his servant to bring him his sword. And with his sword in hand he pronounced to the mothers his verdict. Divide the living boy in two and give half to each mother. One mother immediately exclaimed, No, don't do that, let the other woman have the baby, but certainly do not kill him! The King then responded. Give that woman the living boy. Do not kill him. She is his mother.

King Solomon was very shrewd, and very wise. So is that what wisdom is – being smarter in some sense than the rest of the crowd? Well, that might be part of it. But wisdom is much more than that too. Our passage from the Wisdom of Solomon says that wisdom is a reflection of eternal light. A little later on it says that wisdom is the breath of God. That reminds us of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom comes to us from God and is what God desires for us.

We have heard from James, the brother of Jesus, for a few weeks now. His overall message throughout this letter is basically, “If you call yourselves Christians, well, gosh darn it, act like it!” Don’t just tell me about what great faith you have, do something that puts that faith into action.

And that brings us to Peter who is ready for action at all times. First Peter says the exact right thing in response to Jesus question to the disciples about who they think he is. He sees who Jesus really is. But then, poor Peter, doesn’t understand what being the messiah really means. He’s happy to go into action for Jesus, but what Peter’s exchange with Jesus shows is that both faith and action are not enough. Jesus does not ask his disciples to have blind faith. And he doesn’t want them to fly into action without knowing the truth about himself. Without understanding, without wisdom, faith and works are both useless.

So, Jesus tells the disciples what must happen to him; that he must undergo great suffering, be killed and then rise again in three days. Peter can’t believe it, and can’t keep quiet about it. His tongue betrays his lack of understanding.

Peter’s idea of who the messiah should be is like a wise king, like King Solomon, who was to come and rip his enemies to shreds, and kick out the Romans from Jerusalem and Palestine and restore God’s chosen people to their kingdom. A messiah who will be tortured and killed makes no sense whatsoever to Peter. That is not what God’s chosen people have hoped for. So who can blame him for not understanding the strange things that Jesus told him. Would we be any wiser than Peter in the same circumstance?

As I said last week, for us as Christians, Jesus IS Wisdom come from God. He teaches us how to live and he is LIFE. He teaches us how to love and he is LOVE.

But the sort of wisdom and love and life that Jesus brings us is not like anything that people had ever experienced. We have to love our enemies? We have to die in order to live? We have to embrace everyone as our neighbor? We have to bring healing and forgiveness to others? This counter cultural wisdom is the heart of Christianity. We must deny our self, or lose our life instead of seeking power and wealth. When you and I do “lose our lives” in

service to others, or through the suffering that life throws at us, what do we find on the other side? We find new life. Just as Jesus told us we would if we follow him.

I have a friend who was near the World Trade Center towers on September 11<sup>th</sup> 8 years ago. She was at Trinity Wall Street at a conference. People came rushing in to tell her that the first tower had fallen, and everyone needed to evacuate the building. The last thing she wanted to do was leave what seemed to her to be the relative safety of the building. But she went down into the street, joining with hundreds and hundreds of others in the ash and smoke filled street. She could see smoke billowing out of the second tower and began to wonder if she would survive this holocaust. In her terror she forgot to even think what happened to all the others she had been with in the conference and whether they might need her help. She was thinking only about her husband and children at home in Connecticut and praying that she might be allowed to live and see them again. She told me that she lost herself in her fear, and she forgot that she was a priest. She thought only about her own safety. But a little girl came up to her there in the street. She had become separated from her own mother, and was in tears of panic about what to do, and where her mother went. Suddenly my friend snapped out of her own self pity and fear, came to her senses, and realized that there was someone here right in front of her that needed her help now. She realized that God gave her a job to do and made her remember who she was. She hugged the little girl and told her that together they would find her mother. The little girl held on fast to my friend's hand and they moved with the sea of people south down to the ferries at the southern tip of Manhattan. My friend was able to comfort the child and eventually they found her mother and there was a tearful reunion.

My friend made it home to Connecticut and was reunited with her family, but to this day she recalls that she could not save herself from the paralyzing terror of that morning. She had to be brought back to life by a little girl whose own fear reminded her that Christ expected her to be his disciple.

This last Friday night there was a news article about a group of people called New York Says Thank You. It too is an example of miraculous new life springing up from the ashes of great loss. Some of the people of NYC who lost so many friends and family, have gotten together in the years following 9/11 and have gone to other parts of the country to help others who have suffered from devastating disasters. This year the group went to the Boy Scout Camp in Little Sioux, Iowa to rebuild the chapel that had been destroyed when a storm came through and

killed four scouts. The New York volunteers are joined by more and more each year as they help others from California to Louisiana and those people in turn help the next year.

Jesus in his wisdom asked a lot of his disciples. The disciples gave up their old lives, and followed Jesus to Jerusalem and to the cross, to loss and to death. But the Gospels were written so that we would know that it is the surprising new life, that Jesus brought all of us in his resurrection. And if we follow him to the cross we too will find wisdom and new life.