

June 16, 2019

Selected verses from Proverbs

Rebecca: These are the proverbs of King Solomon, David's son, king of Israel. Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise. Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair. These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young.

Reader: The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. Yes, the Lord formed me, says Wisdom, from the beginning, before he created anything else. I was there when he established the heavens, when he drew the horizon on the oceans. I was there when he set the clouds above. I was there when he set the limits of the seas, so they would not spread beyond their boundaries. And when he marked out the foundations of the earth. I was beside him, like a master worker; I was his constant delight, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his inhabited world, and delighting in the human race.

Rebecca: Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. She is the tree of life to those who lay hold of her.

Reader: My child, do not let these escape from your sight: keep sound wisdom and prudence, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble. Listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. For whoever finds me finds life and favor from the Lord. Those who miss me, injure themselves, all who hate me, love death.

Rebecca: Wisdom has built her house, she has set her table, she has sent out her servant girls, she calls from the highest places overlooking the town, "Eat my bread and drink of my wine, and live."

June 16, 2019

“Wisdom”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Selected verses from Proverbs

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That was Wisdom speaking. I can just imagine her on high, speaking in those idyllic terms to the multitudes, speaking those words and *rejoicing in God's inhabited world and delighting in the human race*. Proclaiming the virtue of wisdom. So since today's sermon is on wisdom, let's see how wise you all are, by giving you an example from the Bible and King Solomon. Now because Solomon "loved the Lord" and had recently become king, God said to him one night, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." So Solomon asked for wisdom. And the Bible tells us, "The Lord was pleased." Soon after, Solomon was presented this – his first test. Two women came to him arguing over a newborn baby. Each of them passionately and convincingly claimed the child was hers, but they couldn't prove it, and they wanted Solomon to solve the problem and give the baby to the rightful mother. Now, given that scenario, what would you do? Well, this is what Solomon did. He asked for a sword and said, "Cut the child in half and give each woman one half the baby. But the true mother begged Solomon not to do this – she was willing to give up her child to the other woman so that he would live. Solomon then knew which was the real mother, and the baby was given back to her.

Now I wanted to talk about wisdom because, truth be told, it sometimes seems so lacking in today's world. And the line when Wisdom speaks, saying she was with God at the very beginning, *rejoicing in God's inhabited world and delighting in the human race*,... well, I wonder if she would feel that same way now. I know I struggle with that. So let's consider the human race. There are over seven billion people living on the planet. More people than ever before. More people, for sure than in King Solomon's time. Now scientists put the age of the earth at somewhere between four and five billion years old. That's incredible, don't you think? The earth being five billion years old. And the human race only appeared on earth in the last fifty thousand years or so. Now if I scaled those numbers down for you, to say a period of only one year, that means the human race has just showed up in the last second to midnight on December 31st of the year! Today, there's a lot of talk about how we're destroying the earth through climate change, plastics in the ocean, damage to natural habitats and ecosystems, and so many other things... and I don't dispute that. But it seems to me, based on what the earth has probably gone through over all those billions of years, it's not the earth we're going to destroy... as much as it's ourselves. You see, I'm betting the earth will survive. I'm not so sure about us.

Why? Well, it has to do with that lack of wisdom, and I'll even add prudence – the ability to act with wisdom. Think about it. Today's challenges are challenges that no other civilization has had to deal with. Ever! For example, look at the negative effects of social media. Look at how sex, drugs and alcohol have permeated our society. Look at the division of wealth in the world, and how so many live in poverty and don't have access to medical and educational opportunities. Have we really been wise in meeting these challenges? Well, look at the results. Consider how the social cohesion and the civility within our society is breaking apart in so many ways. Consider the breakdown of relationships and the family unit. Consider all the young people unable to cope, unable to secure a job commensurate with all the technological advancements that are occurring. Consider all the substance abuse. Consider the fact that approximately 1 in 30 of our population is in jail or on probation or parole. I could go on, but I think you would agree there is a problem.

That's why it's important to talk about wisdom and the need for wisdom. Because, as we heard today, with wisdom, "you will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble." You see, I think many of the problems that plague us today might better be solved if we took the virtues of wisdom and prudence seriously and made them something we strive for. Let's look a little more closely at wisdom. Wisdom, when you think about it, is really seeing life from the big picture. Not focused inward, concerned only with self, but looking outward at the bigger picture, with understanding, and a desire for the greater good. That's the perspective that God wants us to have regarding all aspects of our lives. That's the way ideas can flow, opportunities are created, and everyone benefits. As an example, let me give you a sports analogy. Now, as hard as it is to believe, the New England Patriots held several practice sessions a couple weeks ago - the first game of the season is only twelve weeks away! And, of course, Tom Brady was right there on the field practicing as well. We're fortunate here in New England to have a great football team. And there's probably no better leader and quarterback than Tom Brady. And that's because for one thing, he's able to see the big picture on the field level, where there's all sorts of decisions to make and things coming at him from all directions. I remember watching a playoff game last season and the commentator was former Dallas Cowboy's quarterback Tony Romo. And from his perspective high in the booth, he was able to look down on the field and know exactly what plays should be called, and what adjustments had to be made. And sure enough, Brady would do exactly as he said every time. You see, Brady could make the right decisions and make adjustments because he could see and understand the big picture at the field level, where all the action occurs. There he creates opportunities for winning, and the result – they're the greatest Super Bowl team of all time. Do you see

why wisdom – the big picture perspective, is so important? Yet the short term view, the narrow view, the immediate need for self-gratification, so often wins out. And the result – some of those problems I spoke about earlier.

And there are other places we see the results of lack of wisdom in the culture around us. Let's go back to King Solomon a minute, and imagine if the Lord came to you one day, like he did Solomon, and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you," ... what would you ask for? I think lots of people would probably choose power or riches or beauty, things like that. And yet, almost every day, every day, we see people who have these things fail miserably because they don't practice the virtues of wisdom and prudence. Look at powerful leaders like Maduro in Venezuela or Assad in Syria, who are considered pariahs by the civilized world. Or, actors and actresses having beauty and fame, and have become addicted to drugs or alcohol or sex or cheating and lying to get their privileged kids into colleges. How about wealthy people like Paul Manafort, who soon might be spending time in Rikers Island jail in solitary confinement for fraud. There's even a Gospel lesson that illustrates how powerfully the things of this world have a hold on people. Remember the story of the rich young ruler and Jesus. The young man wanted to know what he could do to inherit eternal life. I imagine he was admired and respected as a person of both wealth and position. He even seemed to realize that with his wealth and influence came a certain level of responsibility. St. Mark tells us the young man ran to Jesus, and knelt down, asking, "What must I do to have eternal life?" What he was really saying was that, "I have everything, but I know that there's more than power and money and material things." The Bible tells us Jesus looked at the man and felt a great love for him, just like he has for us. Jesus told him, "You know the commandments: do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not testify falsely, do not cheat, honor your father and mother." The man replied, "Teacher, I have obeyed all these laws since I was a child." Then Jesus said, "Sell all you have, give the money to the poor, and then come and follow me. Follow me!" But the man just couldn't do it. That's the influence things of this earth, things like power and riches and beauty have over our lives. Wisdom and prudence? Not so much.

Okay – so if wisdom is so important, how do we gain wisdom? Well, let's look at an interesting connection to what Wisdom herself says and a very important theme in the Gospel of St. John. We heard today that Wisdom has built her house, and has prepared a banquet. She calls from the highest places overlooking the town, "Come, eat my bread and drink my wine, and live." It's interesting that in John's Gospel, we hear a very similar plea. Jesus tells us, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me

will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst. Eat of this bread and you will live.” What Jesus is saying is that he is now the source of wisdom for us. We see this even at the beginning of John’s Gospel when John talks about the Word. You see, at that time, Jews viewed the “Word” of God as the personification of divine wisdom. And John tells us that “the Word” – the wisdom of God, became flesh. Jesus Christ, who said, “I am the way and the truth and the life,” says to each one of us, “Come to me. Follow me.” The rich young ruler couldn’t do it! Can we do it? If we want to obtain the wisdom we need to make good and right decisions in our lives, we need to look to our Lord Jesus Christ. To learn his teachings, to follow his teachings, so that we begin to think like Jesus. To see the big picture of where we fit into God’s plan for us and for this earth we should rejoice in and the people around us we should delight in.

Brothers and sisters, it’s true – we have so much coming at us in so many different ways. And so pray, and like Solomon, ask for wisdom, for then “you will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble.” Amen