

Proverbs 8: 1, 21 – 36; Revelation 4

What is wisdom? It's something we all hope to receive. It's something we supposedly admire in others and perhaps aspire to in ourselves. It is a quality much admired by writers and thinkers and often much feared by politicians and especially by would-be dictators. According to 'The Collins English Dictionary': *"Wisdom is the ability to use your experience and knowledge in order to make sensible decisions or judgments. ...the patience and wisdom that comes from old age."*

It would be nice to think that wisdom grows as we age wouldn't it, but there is no guarantee? Shakespeare's Fool speaks sadly to his elderly, broken and exiled master, King Lear: *"Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise."* Whatever our age, we all do and say risky things, unwise things and mostly we seem to survive our own stupidity, but real wisdom is much more deeply rooted than simply not making foolish decisions, spouting thoughtless words, or undertaking rushed judgments.

Let me tell you a short story that I found recently: the author is unknown and the actual location unspecified, but it is a universal tale I think.

It's called **The Wise Woman's Stone:**

A wise woman who was travelling in the mountains found a rare precious stone in a stream. She put it in her bag and continued her journey. The next day she met another traveller who was tired and hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food with him. When she did this the hungry traveller saw the precious stone and asked the woman if she would give it to him. She did so without any hesitation. The traveller left immediately, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. However, a few days later he came back into the mountains to find the wise woman and return the stone to her. She asked him why he had come back.

He said: "I know how valuable the stone is, and you didn't hesitate to give it to me when I asked you, but since then I've been thinking and praying and realized that you have something even more precious than that stone, something that I need."

"What is that?" she said.

"Well, I brought it back," he said, "in the hope that you can give me what you have within you, that meant you actually gave me something even more precious than that stone. PTO

Please teach me the wisdom that enabled you to give me the stone.”

(Author Unknown but adapted from the website mirthandmotivation.com)

Well, it's a story, a myth, but it tells us in its own way of the out-workings of wisdom. She didn't give the stone up because he had frightened or threatened her; perceiving his need, she freely handed it over...but her wisdom was such that in responding to another person's needs so generously, she taught him to recognize the real value of a loving action, which can never be measured in gold or silver, or precious stones. **In Proverbs 8, “Wisdom” is personified as a woman** and calls out to us: ***understanding raises her voice***. The writer is telling us that Wisdom is God's creation, indeed that all of creation is a manifestation of that wisdom. Before the beginnings of the earth, before seas or the mountains or even the heavens, the Wisdom of God was there. Wisdom is the foundation of the created universe, of time itself and of all that God's grace offers to us.

The poetic description of Wisdom and its place in the world is highly dramatic. Similarly dramatic is the illustration of heaven, given to us in tonight's reading from Revelation 4. The majesty of God placed in heaven is described in words that can only touch on the awesome encounter with the Creator, which we are invited to glimpse in John's writing. In both passages we could be forgiven for assuming that these things are too high and mighty for us, it is too hard to attain either wisdom or a place with the heavenly host. And yet.....

.... What did the wise woman in the story do? She showed love to the traveller, who was ignorant of what love meant. She showed that **love is the foundation of wisdom**. Is that message so very far from what we believe and what we aspire to? What is our faith based on?

We can't live our daily lives in the rapture of the heavenly host, but we can aspire through our faith in Christ to something that is even greater. We can aspire to living our lives in and through the Wisdom of Christ. We can in faith, remember that Christ is the fulfilment of God's wisdom. In the verses from Proverbs are lines that can easily identify with Christ himself: very close in many ways to his words from the Sermon on the Mount:

“And now, my children, listen to me:

happy are those who keep my ways.

**³³ Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.**

**³⁴ Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.”**

(turn to next page)

The happiness is available to us all, even if at times we fail to keep his ways, as we surely will, it is Jesus' voice that guides us through the cacophony of the world. It is his call to us that guides our responses to the needs of others, whether they are close by, or in more distant places. Living next door, in our own communities, in Ukraine, in Turkey in Syria, in so many places. God's Wisdom will show us what we need to do.

**³⁵ For whoever finds me, finds life
and obtains favour from the LORD,
³⁶ but those who miss me injure themselves;
all who hate me love death."**

Those who fail to hear, or to seek God's Wisdom will never know God's mind and it is only through seeking to learn that wisdom that **"we draw close to the one who is wisdom incarnate, Jesus Christ our Lord."** *Dr Michael Milton, Erskine Seminary*

It is our task, not only to receive that wisdom ourselves, but to allow it to shape our lives in such a way that we can impart it to others, so that Christ's love will continually spread throughout the world. The Wisdom of God, in Christ is a very precious stone to be shared.

Amen