

“Filled with Wisdom”

Luke 2:40-52

We live in the so called Information age. If we don't know something, we can look it up almost instantaneously. If you forget a recipe, you can search and find it, or another one that may be even better, though you may have to scroll through a long story before you get to the actual recipe. If you don't know how to do a home repair task, you can search for tutorials on YouTube.

But because we have so much access to so much knowledge, we need wisdom even more. In fact, there are some who say we need to move away from the sage on a stage style of education, with a lecturer imparting knowledge, and move into more guiding, focusing on teaching how to learn instead of teaching facts and figures. We see this as debates about the pandemic and how to respond to it continue, with calls to “follow the science” being met by skepticism as the science changes with more information and research. We need wisdom to help us sort all of the knowledge available to us.

Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not using one in a fruit salad. Philosophy, the love of wisdom or the study of wisdom, makes us then ask questions like, is ketchup a smoothie? Knowledge can be good or bad. Wisdom helps use knowledge for good. Knowledge without wisdom can lead to disaster. As Dr. Ian Malcom, Jeff Goldblum's character in the original Jurassic Park says, "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could that they didn't stop to think if they should." We are surrounded by knowledge, and need wisdom to be able to sort through all of the information available to us.

Wisdom helps us use our knowledge well. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” Knowledge by itself can lead to pride and thinking higher of yourself than you ought to. What should determine the behavior of a baptized child of God is not “knowledge about” something, but “love for” someone: If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.” Knowledge can be used wisely or foolishly, as can everything else in our lives.

Today we're reminded of the importance of wisdom. Our Old Testament lesson gives the story of King Solomon being giving wisdom by God. Given the opportunity to ask God for anything, Solomon chooses wisely and asks for wisdom. Yet Solomon's wisdom would eventually fail him. He'd forget that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and would stray away to worship the other gods of his many wives from other lands, marriages used to create alliances and peace between different peoples. His wisdom wouldn't last.

The Hebrew word for wisdom is Chokmah. As theologian Chad Bird describes it, “Chokmah is not merely IQ, bookish knowledge, or street smarts; it's all these and much more. Biblical wisdom is holistic: wise hands to engage in good; a wise mind in love with God's Word and world; a wise mouth to echo divine wisdom; a wise listening heart that heeds the divine voice. Chokmah is the gift to mirror—in speech, thought, will, and action—the wise God in whose image we are fashioned.”

Jesus lives out that definition of wisdom, showing us in speech, thought, will and action,

the wise God who created us in His image. But we're especially reminded of this as we read the one story we have of Jesus as a child, when Jesus is in the temple. Both at the beginning and end of this passage, we're reminded that Jesus increased in wisdom. These words suggest that Jesus did not come into this world as a super-genius with all the answers to life's questions. They instead remind us of Jesus' human nature. The One who is the Word of God learns how to read and write. The one whose mighty arm saved his people has strengthened his arms working with his father. The one who cares for us all was cared for by his human parents.

When Jesus goes to the temple, he begins his time as a teacher. The scribes and teachers there are amazed and astounded by Jesus' knowledge of the Scriptures, but they shouldn't be surprised that the Word of God knows the word of God. Mary and Joseph are surprised and amazed and probably a bit angry that Jesus was there and not with them. But we see here that the only thing Jesus seems not to understand is how his parents could not understand where he was, where he was supposed to be.

Jesus and his wisdom would continue to confound his family. Later, his family would think he was crazy. If we weren't hearing these readings for the 2nd Sunday after Christmas, we could be observing Epiphany, the coming of the wise men. Their wisdom helped them to see the sign of the star and that it pointed to the birth of a king, but their knowledge of how the world worked sent them to Herod's palace to look for the king, instead of to the little town of Bethlehem and the humble home of Mary and Joseph.

God frustrated the wisdom of the world when he came to earth as Jesus. He caused the wisdom of the world to perish when he came and told the Pharisees that they'd missed God's wisdom by focusing on the minutiae of the laws instead of on the God who loved them. Jesus turned the wisdom of the world upside down when he showed that he came not to be served but to serve. He caused the wisdom of the world to perish by ending all of our attempts at justifying ourselves when he took all of the sin of the world on himself on the cross, taking the punishment that he didn't deserve, but we did and do. He overcame the wisdom of the world when he didn't stay dead and rose from the dead that first Easter morning.

Our sinful nature keeps pulling us to choose poorly. But that's why Jesus came. Jesus, the personified wisdom of God, came down into all of this world's full of folly and foolishness. He took all of our unwise decisions, foolish actions, and took them to the cross, which seems like foolishness to those who don't believe. But that foolish act, Jesus dying on the cross, is what began to restore God's creation to the way it should be. Wisdom dying on the cross lead to the restoration of wisdom and the beginning of the end of our foolishness.

God's wisdom comes to us as a gift. God causes the wisdom of the world to perish so that we look to him, even when it seems foolish. C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, writes "Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that [strange] twist about it

that real things have.” Remaining faithful to God may seem foolish in the face of the wisdom of the world, but its foolishness is what shows us its truth.

We believe some things that sound ridiculous. We believe that God created the heavens and the earth, even in the face of claims of science that God isn't needed. We believe that God came to earth as a baby. We teach that Jesus was raised from the dead, even though our senses and experiences tell us that resurrections don't happen. We teach that the splashing of a little water on a baby's head plants the seed of faith. We teach that we are joined with God and each other by eating bread and drinking wine. The way that God works often seems foolish to us.

But a fool's God is the only God that would send his Son to die and save us from our sins. That's why we preach Christ crucified. That's why we believe in God's only-begotten Son. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Jesus came into the world to make us wise. He personified God's wisdom. He showed God's wisdom to all he met. He continues to point us to realize that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. He continues to give us wonderful gifts, and helps us use them wisely. That's a wonderful gift.

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