

## **Wise Up!** (Proverbs 1:20-2:8; James 3:13-17; Mark 6:2-11)

"Wise up!" This is what someone usually says to us if they think we're being too naïve--if we're not worldly enough. "You think no one's going to cheat on that test? Wise up!" "He's only helping you to be nice? Wise up--he wants something!"

Other than this, we don't talk a lot about wisdom. But, our scripture lessons for today are about wisdom. And so today, let's be wise and give wisdom our attention.

The word *wisdom* comes from the Latin word *videre*, meaning *to see*. The word *video* comes from that same root. Wisdom then is a certain way of seeing life (*Questions Of The Heart*, Edward Chinn, CSS Publishing Co., Inc., 1987, 0-89536-877-3). According to Wikipedia, "Wisdom is a deep understanding and realizing of people, things, events or situations, resulting in the ability to choose or act to consistently produce the optimum results with a minimum of time and energy...Wisdom is comprehension of what is true or right coupled with optimum judgment as to action...Wisdom often requires control of one's emotional reactions (the "passions") so that one's principles, reason and knowledge prevail to determine one's actions." To summarize, wisdom is seeking, seeing, understanding, and doing what is true and right, making the best possible decisions for the best possible outcome for ourselves, others, and the world.

Every day we're faced with decisions. However, all too often, we make snap decisions, follow our own selfish, greedy desires, and model our behavior after the behavior we see on television and in the movies. In our foolishness, we end up creating huge problems for ourselves, for those around us, and for God's universe. Just consider the thinking of those who gave us the Deepwater Horizon Well disaster: "We're experts. We know what we're doing. We don't need to have a backup for our well." Time and time again, left to ourselves, we create disaster.

There's a real need for wisdom. Our politics cries for wisdom. Our pharmaceutical and medical systems cry for wisdom. Our courts cry for wisdom. Our morals and ethics cry for wisdom. Our social problems cry for wisdom. Our religion cries for wisdom. Our families cry for wisdom. The

personal issues, problems, decisions, choices that face us each and every day cry wisdom. To go out or to study? Which college to choose? Which career to choose? Which job to choose? To give in to temptation or not? How to meet a potential mate? To have premarital sex or not? Whom to marry? To apologize or not? To forgive or not? Whom to trust? What do we really want? What makes us happy? Which church to attend? How should we handle our criminals? When does life begin? To have children or not? How many children to have? Where to live? To have surgery or not? To drive or not? When should we allow someone to die naturally? Where to invest our money? How much money to pledge to church? To attend Bible study, Sunday school, worship or not? To get involved at church or not?

We call some of our last teeth that come in *wisdom teeth*, implying that when we reach the age that our wisdom teeth come in, we're old enough to begin seeing life in a different way than we saw it when we were children. A certain maturity is implied.

But, of course, we all know better than this. Human experience has taught us that wisdom doesn't necessarily come automatically with age. Nor does wisdom automatically come with IQ or education. Bill Clinton was a Rhodes scholar, but his affair with Monica Lewinsky was far from wise. We cannot earn, inherit, or buy wisdom.

Nor can we get it from all those worldly voices constantly calling out to us. On *Oprah*, the internet, television...so many voices, all claiming to offer us wisdom.

One Sunday morning when all the kids in the junior high Sunday school class kept talking amongst themselves instead of focusing on the lesson, the teacher decided to make a point. She asked for three volunteers, explaining that all they had to do was talk. The three students stood before the others and were given final instructions: all they had to do was talk for two minutes without stopping. The only catch was that all three had to talk at the same time. Looking at her watch, the teacher told the students to begin talking. The first girl began talking about the latest fashions. The second student began a play-by-play account of the baseball game he had watched the evening before. The third student told of seeing a car broken down on the side of the road. When the two minutes were up, the out-of-breath students

stopped talking. When the teacher asked the rest of the class what they heard, no one could recall in detail what anyone had said. The wise teacher explained to the class that in life there will always be many voices crying out for attention but that if you want to learn something, you have to focus on one voice (*No Particular Place To Go*, Timothy J. Smith, CSS Publishing Company, 1996, 0-7880-0782-3). So many voices around us in our everyday living compete for our attention, claiming to offer us wisdom. But later we discover that they do not deliver, and we were far from wise to have even tried to listen to them all.

Friends, if we want to have wisdom, we must look to our Bibles. And when we do, we see that in the early days of Israel, the people understood what God wanted of them. Sure, they fell short, deliberately even sinned sometimes. But they were clear on how they were suppose to live their lives.

Then, under King Solomon, Israel ventured outside of herself into the world. Trade and travel and marriage with non-Israelites brought cultural and religious pluralism. New ideas were enticing. The old traditions and ways seemed irrelevant. The nation was changing. It was no longer a religious society. It was becoming a secular society. As the Jews turned away from the priests, teachers known as "the wise" became popular.

The wise believed that God built the world and life itself to run best in certain logical ways. They thought that if we could figure out what those ways were, and then do our best to cooperate with them, living in harmony with the order of God's world, then our lives would be happy, and we would have well-being (*Sermons on the First Readings: Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost, Middle Third, A Hearing Heart*, Stan Purdum, CSS Publishing Company, Inc., 0-7880-2368-3c).

Thus the wise were teachers who observed life and came up with ideas about how to best live. Some of these wise people were employed by kings to advise them on affairs of state and on personal matters as well. The wise issued their teachings in the form of sayings, fables, oracles, epics, riddles, poetry, myths, and proverbs. Thus, eventually there was a whole body of written material called wisdom literature. In the Old Testament, Proverbs, along with Ecclesiastes, Job, and certain of the Psalms, are examples of this special kind of writing (*Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost, First Third: Wisdom's Delight*, Stan Purdum, CSS Publishing Company, Inc., 0-7880-2397-7c).

In the Book of Proverbs, it is clearly stated that wisdom comes from God. And wisdom is likened to a woman who's walking the streets, crying out in the market, on the city walls, at the city gates for men to draw near. This would have been a shocking metaphor for those in the ancient world. A lady of good reputation had much more modest behavior. But Lady Wisdom wants to get everyone's attention so that they can hear and learn what she has to teach them. This outrageous metaphor illustrates just how passionate God is to about wanting people to hear his wisdom and to live their lives according to his wisdom. There's an urgency because people are ignoring wisdom and as a result falling into calamity, panicking, having to "eat the fruit of their way," and dying much too young. Only the wise will dwell secure. So Lady Wisdom passionately walks the streets and shouts, "Wise up!"

After giving this metaphor, the Book of Proverbs is one wisdom saying after another to encourage us to seek, see, understand, and do what is true and right, making the best possible decisions for the best possible outcome for ourselves, others, and the world. Just listen to some of the wisdom that comes from God through the wisdom teachers, preserved in our Book of Proverbs...

Do not plan harm against your neighbor who lives trustingly beside you. Do not quarrel with anyone without cause. Do not envy the violent and do not choose any of their ways. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that devises wicked plans; feet that hurry to run to evil; a lying witness, and one who sows discord in a family. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not find words of knowledge. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Happy are those who trust in the Lord. Those who are attentive to a matter will prosper. Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty. Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

In the New Testament, the importance of wisdom is also stressed. Those who seek and worship Jesus are identified as *wise* men. We're told that Jesus "increased in *wisdom*" as well as years. We're told that "On the

Sabbath, (Jesus) began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this *wisdom* that has been given to him?' We're told that Jesus told his disciples, "I will give you words and a *wisdom* that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict" (Luke 21:15). In the New Testament, Jesus is God's shining example of a person who looked to God for wisdom, a shining example of how we are to live our lives, as wise men, women, youth, and children.

We've probably all had the frustrating experience of trying to put something together. "When all else fails, read the directions," right? Well, the same thing is true with trying to put our lives together. Often our lives get so frustrating. But, "when all else fails, let's read the directions." God has given us the life of Jesus and such wisdom literature as Proverbs as the directions to be followed for putting our lives together, to make it easier for us to seek, see, understand, and do what is true and right, making the best possible decisions for the best possible outcome for ourselves, others, and the world.

For the living of our days, we urgently need wisdom. And the good news is that wisdom is within the reach of each and every one of us. Regardless of our family background, our age, our education, our IQ, how plain and simple we may think we are, each of us can be wise. There is no need for us to be foolish. When we attend worship, read the Bible, pray, participate in Bible study and Sunday school classes, God is able to impart some of his wisdom to us. Wisdom comes to the simple, humble person who looks to God for wisdom. So let's look to God to "wise up!" Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; June 6, 2010