

# ***The Beginning of Wisdom***

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – Psalm 78:1-7 & Wisdom 6:12-20)

My brother used to say ‘These people with degrees and fancy education just don’t understand the simple things, I ask a simple question’, he would continue. ‘and you answer a completely different question’. Brothers are given clearly to keep you humble.

Wisdom.

What do you think wisdom is? Is it being clever or is it simple common sense? Is it making the simple profound and the profound simple? Is it pure reason?

James asks in Chapter 3 of his letter, - who amongst you thinks they are wise? He contrasts heavenly wisdom with earthly wisdom. Heavenly wisdom develops gentleness, peace and mercy. By contrast earthly wisdom is associated with strife, envy, hypocrisy and selfish ambition

In the Australian book ‘The Getting of Wisdom’, the author Miles Franklin has to pass herself off as man to get published and be taken seriously.

The Psalmist in words, which I am slowly beginning to appreciate more and more, suggests, that one’s grey hair is a sign of their wisdom.

Our readings today speak of wisdom. The Psalmist says that being wise is to listen to God’s teaching in parables, in stories from old, in what our ancestors have told us, and then challenges us to share it all with the following generations.

In our reading from the book of the Wisdom of Solomon wisdom is described as radiant, unfading, easily found when search for it. Fixing one’s thoughts on wisdom will lead to perfect understanding, to freedom and nearer to God. Wanting to learn is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom will mean following laws/commandments. When sought it will graciously appear in thoughts and on the path of life. This book is in the part of the bible we call the Apocrypha and despite its name was not written by Solomon. It was written much later (about 1 BC) and contains traditional Hebrew wisdom and contemporary wisdom from the Greek world.

Solomon was known as Israel’s wisest king. He succeeded his father David as King and we are told he loved the Lord, obeyed the law and by the account in 1 Kings 3 made appropriate sacrifices as his faith required. In a dream the Lord asks him what he wanted. Rather than a shopping list, as sometimes our prayers are, Solomon asks for a far greater gift. In his humility and acknowledging the great task he has set before him he asks for an understanding mind so that he could govern God’s people and the ability to discern between good and evil. What a wonderful request.

The book of Proverbs provides as with many wise sayings – once on a trip to the Barossa Valley for a friend’s wedding I read the entire book and created an entire speech out of the sayings which I read to them at their reception. Part of it referred to the capable woman who is exhorted for her wisdom – she is presented as a person who is resourceful, diligent, compassionate, hardworking, prepared, a good business woman, supportive of and helpful to her partner. Her life and her words teach wisdom. She is motivated by love for others and for God.

I suspect we find wisdom in unexpected and hidden places. Let me share a few stories:

Once I created a children's talk to help them understand the trinity – God is one and yet God is three. Using shapes to illustrate the point and of course my main shape was to be a triangle, imagine my surprise when after I had asked if you could describe God as a shape what would it be one, answered a circle (I had expected triangle). When I asked her why, she said how else could he hold the world in his arms – hidden wisdom indeed, what do they say 'out of the mouths of babes'. Another time following a Maundy Thursday Service I was sitting outside with a 4 year old trying to explain the last supper, Good Friday and Easter day. In the church yard was an illuminated cross and I was using that to help explain the whole story. As we talked, she simply turned to me and asked – Why didn't his mum and dad just get a ladder and get Jesus down of the cross. Why indeed. Hidden wisdom. On another I was walking through the bush just south of Perth with a five and three year old. As we looked at wildflowers and banksias, the five year old announced her revelation – Who'd have thought nature would be so beautiful! Who indeed would have thought! Words of wisdom from unexpected places.

A few years ago, an asylum seeker friend was at a hearing about his visa application. I had baptised him 18 months earlier after a long journey of exploring Christianity. During the six hour hearing, he was asked, why he had converted to one violent religion from another. He asked what they meant and the person presiding quoted from Matthew that Jesus had not come to bring peace but the sword. I would have been furious that such a quote had been taken out of context and used to test him were I there. He on the other hand, following in the manner of Jesus, answered the question with a question and said –what about all the times Jesus said you must love your neighbour. Later that day, I asked if he still wanted to meet for dinner or was he too exhausted? He responded, of course he would meet with his Christian friends – his faith was stronger than immigration. Hidden wisdom!

When I think about Jesus being a man of wisdom, I am reminded that he seeks God in prayer, when needing to discern what to do next he usually goes up a mountain to pray. In his interactions with people he calmly reacts to their questions (usually) and will not be caught out by their trick questions and often answers questions with questions, turning the tables on the questioner. He lives out the adage - that love of God and love of neighbour comes first. People come before rules and religiosity. Godly wisdom to live by.

As we have journeyed with Matthew's gospel this year, we have seen worldly wisdom turned on its head. In his stories and parables, in his interactions we hear him say Tax collectors, prostitutes enter the kingdom of heaven first, that after obeying the commandments the next thing you need to do is sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor. There are stories of great rejoicing when a sheep or coin is found, sowing seeds wastefully and even if the weeds grow amongst the wheat let them co-exist. He calls fishermen to follow rather than learned men. On the mountain he says the most unexpected things the blessed are the meek, the mourners, the persecuted, the peacemakers. He chooses to dine with the hated – Zaccheus the tax-collector. A feisty Canaanite woman (an outsider) changes his mind and challenges his prejudice.

So how do we get this wisdom?

Let's start with prayer – let's ask for it.

Let's want it and seek it.

Let's look for it unexpected and hidden places.

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Let's look at the Solomon, Jesus, the capable woman, children, asylum seekers as our inspiration and examples.

The lives we live will reveal the wisdom we choose to live by. Let us live lives of compassion, lives where we live for others, lives where we welcome the most vulnerable into our midst, lives of generosity, laughter and joy.

May you go out this week and may you discover pearls of wisdom on your path.

The getting of wisdom has begun. Amen.