

God's Hidden Wisdom

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on July 5th, 2026 – Matthew 11:16-18, 25-30)

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More than twenty-five years ago, when I began my ministry, I was a children's pastor, trying to impart to the children some of the things I was learning in my theological studies.

Each week I would create a children's talk, one week I was trying to explain the Trinity. I was using shapes to help them understand, of course my main shape was a triangle. I asked the children what shape they would use to describe God; my answer was of course a triangle. One child said, 'God of course was a circle'. When asked why she said - how else could he hold the world in his arms. God's hidden wisdom from the mouth of a child.

Another time after 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. God's hidden wisdom.

In a bible study with a group of asylum seekers where we were looking at the story of Palm Sunday and Jesus Crucifixion, I learnt a very powerful lesson. Exasperated as they read the story of Jesus' entry into the city, they asked me why the crowd was so stupid – they knew the next part of the story – that this crowd who were celebrating now would soon call for Jesus to die. As they continued to read the text in Farsi, I noticed most of them (men and women) were crying. I did a double take and wondered why they should be so emotional. In their tears I was being reminded that I had become blind to the power of the story that is at the centre of our faith. They taught me about its power, they reminded me of the brutality and injustice of this event, they reminded me of Jesus and his great compassion to take this all on and then seek God's forgiveness for the people. It was a very long time since I had allowed myself to enter into the story like that. Most of these people were new to the faith but understood the power of the story in ways I could not. God's hidden wisdom!

Our bible reading from Matthew makes it clear that God's wisdom has been revealed to infants rather than to the wise, smart, intelligent ones. Something I hope my stories have illustrated. We find many such examples in the gospel where infants, outsiders understand God's hidden wisdom when the religious and educated seem to miss it.

God's hidden wisdom revealed to those we might not expect!

What hidden wisdom can we find in our readings today, which seem to be a bit of an odd collection of sayings and stories?

Let's take it bit by bit.

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First, we have a story or parable about children in the marketplace. Here Jesus compares people around him (his critics, the religious elite) to those who sit in the marketplace where children are playing, singing and dancing and will not join in, will not share the children's joy. We would call them killjoys, they will not risk participation, they will not risk having a good time. They sit on the sidelines judging and criticising. He then goes further and says when they are sad, they will not show compassion for them. God's hidden wisdom here seems to be saying that we shouldn't sit on sidelines as uninvolved or even worse critical spectators, we should instead jump in and share the joy of others and carry the burdens of others.

Next Jesus compares himself and John the Baptist and how different they were and yet the religious elite condemned them both. John whose lifestyle was different - tea-totaller, living in the wilderness, fasting, preaching repentance was described as having a demon. Jesus on the other hand enjoyed a party or two and sharing meals with people - for that he was criticised as one who hung out with sinners. What could they do? We all live out our faith in different ways, thank goodness for that, but here John and Jesus are criticised because they didn't live it out in a very rigid way. God's wisdom seems to suggest that all types are welcome in the kingdom of God and that we are free to express our faith in different ways and that God, acceptance and compassion should be the focus.

I have already explored how the wisdom of God is revealed to children and hidden from the supposedly wise and intelligent ones.

Then to the final conundrum. Taking up a yoke, sharing a burden will give you rest. This seems to be the wrong way around. Let's explore what a yoke is and what it does.

A yoke is a crossbar placed across the shoulders of animals to guide them as they pull a plough. It keeps them aligned and moving in the right direction. When two animals are yoked together, the load they carry is evenly distributed. A yoke makes it easier to carry your load, easier in part because the load is shared. Perhaps that is God's wisdom hidden here, that when your load or burden is shared it is lighter and you find some rest from the messiness of life. Sharing the load with Jesus, sharing the load of others will ease everyone's burdens and bring rest to all.

So, what have we learned about God's hidden wisdom? Have we found any pearls of wisdom in our exploration this morning?

Can you hear the invitation of Jesus to share your troubles with him?

In turn, whose burden are you being called to help carry?

Can you hear the invitation of Jesus to join in and participate in the celebrating of the joys of others and sharing in their sadness?

Are you ready to participate in our shared life together rather than sit on the sidelines?

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Can you hear the invitation of Jesus to find God's wisdom in the words and lives of children, of 'sinners', of contemplatives and of the tax collectors of our world and learn from them? To look for the wisdom of God in unexpected places and people.

Are you ready to put away our cleverness and learn from infants? Rev Himbury (former principal of Whitley College) used to tell me all the time that the task of ministry (our combined task) is to make the simple profound and the profound simple.

And may you all find rest in God, who calls us to life in all its fullness. Amen.