

Yet Wisdom is Vindicated by Her Deeds

Good morning Trinity. Can we talk about Wisdom?

As we heard in today's Gospel lesson Jesus said to the crowds, "Yet Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

In the Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, Wisdom is a character. She, and Wisdom is a feminine word in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, is understood as a gift from God which, when listened to, builds our character. Wisdom is not God, but in fact is understood as being created by God. For a primer on Wisdom you might read the 8th chapter of Proverbs. There Wisdom claims to have been the first thing created by God, for the purpose of bringing order out of chaos.

The Psalmist often refers to Wisdom and what she does for humanity, saying once that Wisdom guards and protects us, and at a different time that Wisdom grants us humility.

Indeed Wisdom is always present in our lives, to teach and instruct, to form and shape, to guard and protect.

In the New Testament only one book is written in the Wisdom tradition, although Wisdom sayings are found in many parts of the New Testament's witness to Jesus. It is the Epistle of James that is a Wisdom writing, and in it James describes Wisdom from God as:

James 3: 17 *But the wisdom from above is **first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*** (ESV)

Yet Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

So the deeds produced in you and in me, the deeds we look for as evidence of both our spirituality and our maturity are:

purity,
peaceableness,
gentle,
being open to reason,
showing mercy,
producing good fruits,
impartiality and sincerity.

If James' description for Wisdom reminds you of Christ, well that is the goal. Wisdom forms our characters to be increasingly reflective of God's will, and that is best seen in Jesus.

The results of Wisdom are evident. But so is the lack of Wisdom. The life not formed by Wisdom the scriptures say is foolishness.

Jesus chided the crowds for displaying such foolishness. He accused them of playing childish games when arguing against the witness of John the Baptist and Jesus himself.

John came as kind of a crazy wild man, not eating fine foods, not drinking distilled wines. And he was accused of being demonic.

Jesus, on the other hand, freely associated with all sorts of people, including "the wrong crowd". He ate with them, he was known to share a glass of wine at a party. He lived what seemed to be an opposite lifestyle of John. But he wasn't called a normal guy. He was accused of having a drinking problem, of being a glutton, said he could use a 12 step program or two.

Sometimes, when we are foolish, we want it "both ways". Foolishness, the antithesis of Wisdom, often will look for a false flag under which another can be criticized. The reasons given for disapproval are seldom grounded in reality, except for the reality that foolishness does not want to look within itself and seek out truth.

I can not read these words in Matthew at this time and not think about the foolishness of the racist and white supremacist of these days. When Black people and their allies have protested yet again about the violence

endured for centuries by their community, violence inflicted by those same white supremacists and especially by our criminal justice system, we who are white have wanted things “both ways”.

When Colin Kaepernick knelt during the National Anthem we attempted to reframe his actions as unpatriotic. When black celebrities spoke out, using the platforms their fame provided, we said they were abusing their position. When crowds of ordinary people marched in response to police violence carrying signs of “Black Lives Matter” and “I Can’t Breathe”, shouting slogans like “No Justice No Peace” we said that was the wrong way to make a point. And when anger boiled over into destruction and rioting, we sang out songs in the marketplaces, calling to one another our conclusions of just how wrong such actions are.

But that response, our response, is foolish. It is the reaction of little children who refuse to listen. It stems from the fact that any discussion of race in American society makes us uncomfortable. And we would rather play games with protests than listen to the voices of our Black neighbors. For listening requires that we look within ourselves to that place where racism has also formed us, and we may not want to see clearly how distorted our sense of self has become.

Yet Wisdom will be vindicated by her deeds.

It is not the Christ within us, or the Wisdom that is forming us, which drive us to foolish antics. That is the sin within us. Let us be clear, that sin is strong, even for the Christian. Sin wants to pull us away from truth, and from mercy. It wants to separate us from our reason and replace that with rage. It wants to dislodge our gentleness, our impartiality, our peace and our hope, replacing those with fear. A fear that will prevent us from looking within, with honesty.

Sin knows that if we take that honest look we will make discoveries that we would rather keep hidden. But what it also knows is that we will make discoveries that will empower us, set us free and send us forth to produce good fruits, a basket of goodness that reflects the will of God for our lives.

“Come to me,” Jesus said, “all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Mt. 11:28-30)

The metaphor of “Yoke” is a rabbinical way to talk about the task of learning of Torah. Of discovering what it is that God wants for you, how it is that God desires for you to live as God’s people on this earth. Jesus said that is not a lesson too hard for us. He says that is not a lesson from which we must hide. He says it is a lesson that will refresh our souls.

The truth is, like sin, racism is powerful. But is its not stronger than grace.

Like sin, despair and fear are powerful, but they will never vanquish hope.

The ideology of white supremacy may want to form our character, but it is no match for Wisdom.

Paul asked, “Who can rescue us from this body of death?”

He answered his own question by proclaiming, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

I want to hear from you. It is time for the church, especially the white church in America, to rise up and begin the task of dismantling racism. It begins with awareness. I want to hear from you, do you want to be part of this effort? Do you want to put on this yoke of discipleship?

If you do, I want to begin that journey with you. I’d like to meet with you. There are many resources available to us to tackle this challenge. We can meet to pray together, to look within ourselves together, to make discoveries together, discoveries that will set us free.

We can meet face to face (although masked at this time) or we can meet on ZOOM (if the virus is still finding holes in our defenses). This is our moment to be the body of Christ in ways that will speak to the greatest challenge our nation has never been willing to fully face.

I want to hear from you. For those who want to take this journey, I will provide a format for us to begin being the Church together.

For Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.