

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

¹ *Does not wisdom call out?
Does not understanding raise her voice?*
² *At the highest point along the way,
where the paths meet, she takes her stand;*
³ *beside the gate leading into the city,
at the entrance, she cries aloud:*
⁴ *“To you, O people, I call out;
I raise my voice to all mankind.*

*“The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works,[a][b]
before his deeds of old;*
²³ *I was formed long ages ago,
at the very beginning, when the world came to be.*
²⁴ *When there were no watery depths, I was given birth,
when there were no springs overflowing with water;*
²⁵ *before the mountains were settled in place,
before the hills, I was given birth,*
²⁶ *before he made the world or its fields
or any of the dust of the earth.*
²⁷ *I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,*
²⁸ *when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,*
²⁹ *when he gave the sea its boundary
so the waters would not overstep his command,
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.*
³⁰ *Then I was constantly[c] at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,*
³¹ *rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind.*

In his book Directions, author James Hamilton shares this insight about listening to God: “Before refrigerators, people used icehouses to preserve their food. Icehouses had thick walls, no windows and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the icehouses, and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer.

One man lost a valuable watch while working in an icehouse. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn’t find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch.

Amazed, the men asked him how he found it.

I closed the door,” the boy replied, “lay down in the sawdust, kept very still, and listened. Soon I heard the watch ticking.”

In today’s scripture text from Proverbs, Wisdom is shouting out at us to listen! Listen to wisdom before you jump into doing or saying anything. The book of Proverbs is what theologians call Wisdom literature; and it was primarily written by Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he gives practical insights and guidelines for life.

In chapter eight Solomon imagines Wisdom as a female figure created by God who stands at the gates of the city and shouts: “Everyone, listen to me!” The imagery was fitting for the people of Solomon’s day. The old men in the cities used to sit at the gates of the city to discuss and find resolutions to issues the residents of the city brought to them. The people highly respected the old men for their wisdom. So, the people looking for advice or answers listened closely to what the men shared.

Likewise, for us, Wisdom is available in full view to all people. She’s in the places where power is exercised, and choices are made. Wisdom does not cry in unknown or secret places but in the high places, the noticeable places, beside the busy road. She cries out at the intersections of life where the paths meet. Where decisions must be made concerning which path to take. Wisdom is not wishy-washy: “She takes her stand.” She knows the right way and gives correct guidance. But we need to listen carefully when she speaks to us.

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. “I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day,” he recalled in his book Stress Fractures. “Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable.

“I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, ‘Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin’ and I’ll tell you really fast.’

“Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, ‘Honey, you can tell me—and you don’t have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly. I’ll never forget her answer: ‘Then listen slowly.’”

Wisdom has important things to say to us, so it tells us to “listen slowly.” We don’t want to interrupt or jump ahead of wisdom. It’s just not a smart move. It can lead to problems—sometimes, big problems and regrets. It’s been said that “wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you would have preferred to talk.”

Wisdom can get confused with knowledge. They are not the same thing. Knowledge is the gathering of information; and wisdom helps us to know how to use the knowledge we gather. We may acquire tons of knowledge, but without wisdom our knowledge is useless. We must learn how to wisely live out what we know.

It is easy sometimes to put the cart before the horse. You know what I mean. It’s like putting something together—say, like a child’s wagon. Some people will just dump the pieces out of the box and begin putting it together. Then when something doesn’t want to go together right or when the project seems to be completed but there are a few pieces leftover, you realize that you should have read the instructions first. Now, what could have been a quick and simple project turns out to be a frustrating longer-than-anticipated project.

Knowledge and understanding are great tools for establishing our faith in God, but wisdom shows us how to take our knowledge and understanding and use it to make our faith alive. We gain our knowledge through Bible study, worship, prayer and listening to others. We

commit ourselves to learning and following the teachings of Jesus. The wise person knows that whoever seeks God will obtain God's favor, not because he or she knows a lot or has done everything perfectly, but because everything he or she does is aimed at pleasing God.

The wise Christian **practices** what he or she knows. You know the saying that practice makes perfect. Well, it applies to growing in wisdom, too. I took piano lessons as a child. I never got very good at it because I hated to practice. I would get frustrated every time I made a mistake which happened a lot. I would pound on the piano keys when I was frustrated and unless I really liked the piece of music I was trying to learn, I would give up practicing the song. That's why I am a closet piano player. I'm just not good at it because I wasn't patient enough to practice. It takes practice, discipline, and a willingness to learn from our mistakes to grow wiser.

A wise Christian is **honest**. It's easy to come up with a host of excuses why we haven't been following God and God's Wisdom. But God isn't looking for excuses. God is looking for those who are willing to admit that their track record for faithfulness and serving others hasn't been perfect and but want to undergo the instruction necessary to get better.

A wise Christian who practices, who is honest, and who retains wisdom as his or her teacher will become a better disciple. When we listen to wisdom, when we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit who gives us wisdom, improvement in our discipleship is inevitable.

So where does this wisdom come from? Here are just a few possibilities:

Experience. Someone has said that "Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment." Experience is a great teacher.

Age. This is just another way of saying experience. One would hope that as one matures chronologically that one gains both experience and the wisdom that comes with it. I believe that one of the responsibilities we have as older adults is to pass our wisdom on to others. However, even with this responsibility, we still need to use God's wisdom to know when to offer our wisdom so that the receivers of our wisdom do not feel that something is being shoved down their throats when, therefore, our good intentions do more damage than good. We certainly do not want our good intentions to be a stone that gets in the way of someone finding Jesus.

Education. Education alone does not confer wisdom, but it can prove an invaluable asset if used properly. You do not need to be going to school to get an education. There are other ways that we learn things—reading, watching good television, attending Bible studies and worship, talking with others about spiritual topics. There are a lot of ways to acquire knowledge.

A teachable spirit. We need to be open to hearing God's Spirit in our hearts and thoughts; otherwise we cannot obtain Godly wisdom. "He who hates correction is stupid" (Proverbs 12:1, NIV). "The wise in heart accept commands" (Proverbs 10:8 NIV).

Wisdom comes from God. Some people just seem to be gifted with wisdom and good sense. For example, we read about King Josiah in the Old Testament, who even as a child, which is when he inherited the throne after his father was murdered, was blessed by God with wisdom. The religious leaders were not men of God and Josiah knew they needed to go; but he waited until he was 20, which was just the right moment when he was firmly in the saddle of being king to get rid of them and replace them with Godly religious leaders. In James 1, we read that if we lack wisdom, we can ask God for it. In Proverbs, the same book as today's text, we read: "For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (2:6, NIV).

Trusted advisors. These might include family, friends, mentors, pastors. "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20, NIV). People who help us grow in wisdom are connected to God, and, therefore, God's heart is shared through their time and discussions with us. These are the ways we gain wisdom.

Now, you might be asking why this text from Proverbs is scheduled in the lectionary for Trinity Sunday. I often times use the lectionary when I plan my sermon topics. Although we may not know all of the reasons for this, the selection does speak of the trinity in these three ways.

1. It proclaims that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. All this activity of creation, according to Proverbs 8:22-31, is done in the presence of Wisdom.
2. This selection presents Wisdom as God's child in ways similar to Jesus, God's only son. In addition to that, Proverbs 8 affirms Wisdom's presence with God in the beginning of God's created world, similar to the description of the incarnate Word of God in John 1:1-3.
3. Third, Wisdom shares similarities with the Spirit of Truth referenced in John 16:13-14. In John, the Spirit declares what is to come, whereas Wisdom declares what happened in the past when God created the world. But both Wisdom and the Spirit glorify God.

So, wisdom is an integral piece of the Trinity. It's a fundamental element of our spiritual growth as we are connected intimately with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through these we have a special connection to hear the voice of wisdom. Those not in relationship with these, thereby, living a self-centered and self-focused life, may see God's wisdom as something foolish. We know differently.

So, the question I leave you with today is: "Are we listening for the voice of wisdom?" Grant us wisdom, Oh God, and courage which may take us down a different road the rest of the world travels, but it will be God's road. Hallelujah! Amen.