

Bits of Wisdom

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15; Psalm 8, 6-3-07

It is thought that we need to reach “a certain age” before we can be considered “wise.” I, as well as you, know that there are many times age does not automatically confer wisdom on some people. Some go through life never quite getting it.

Merriam-Webster defines “wisdom” as “1. Accumulated philosophic or scientific learning-knowledge, 2. Good sense-judgment or 3. the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships-insight.” All of these definitions indicate that there is the necessity to live life and have a multitude of experiences, both the positive and the negative, before we possess wisdom. William Saroyan said, “Good people are good because they’ve come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success, you know.” If we consider some of the most successful people we know, we sometimes note that they are not very wise in the ways they deal with life.

Of course, I think the third definition I mentioned, that of having “the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships-insight” is the most important of the earmarks of wisdom.

We are told in Proverbs that wisdom is highly prized by God, so treasured that she was created in the very beginning. As such a wonderful quality, wisdom is something we need to strive to attain as we work our various ways through life. Wisdom is always waiting for us to reach out and grasp her. She is always present.

Our reading from Romans, about suffering and endurance and the building of character, points to a growth of understanding of the way of life and, therefore, an increase in wisdom. Through struggles in life, we learn many life lessons and become able to act in and through life instead of merely reacting to what it is we feel life has done to us. Wisdom allows us to work from the inside out, to see things more clearly and to understand people more fully. “Wisdom is the capacity to realize what is of value in life for oneself and others.”

And in the gospel of John we read about the Spirit bringing additional wisdom to those who sought the way, the truth and the life.

Being smart and being wise are two different things. Being wise means that we have the ability to learn how to apply an edge-smoothing element to life. It means that we know and understand that keeping a cool and calm head about us often saves the day. It means that flaring up in quick flashes of anger has its place—but that remaining sensible and reasonable and even counting to ten can have a far better effect on ourselves and others. Wisdom demands patience and sometimes silence when we want most to speak or cry or even howl.

What are some of the bits of wisdom you have discovered and incorporated into your beings as you have traveled through life? I can only share with you a little of what I have discovered through lessons sometimes repeated over and over again.

Sharing with others and never running with a scissors are obvious pieces of wisdom. But I have also learned to listen impartially to both sides of any disagreement and to look for the common ground held by two dissenting adults or children. Children are always far easier people with whom to deal. There are times when this does not come easy to

me. I have to struggle to keep myself from being drawn into the side that provides the most logical answer. I need to back off and give myself some distance before I am able to see the whole picture. I am often far better at seeing individual trees than the whole forest at once. I suspect this is an occupational hazard in some respects.

I have learned that people are pretty good—there are some exceptions. I have rarely encountered someone who oozes pure evil. Once or twice, maybe. But I have maintained the ability to trust until I have been disillusioned by someone many times. And even then, all is never lost. There is always another chance. We are all called to offer another chance to those who have stepped on our toes, or worse. That's what turning the other cheek or walking that second mile is all about. Once we begin doing it, we find it comes more readily.

I have learned that Christians are meant to be used. If we stop allowing other people with needs into our lives because we have been used at one point or another, we limit life. We never know when it is we might entertain angels unaware. We learn a bit of discernment from difficult encounters that broadens our base of wisdom and our understanding of the struggles others face.

I have learned never to have expectations of others—they only lead to disappointment. I have learned never to take myself too seriously—humor-less-ness makes me suffer. I have learned that I do have two ears and one mouth for a reason. I have learned to pause before offering a hasty and uninformed opinion, most times. I have learned, especially lately, through my daughter's ordeal, what it is I treasure most in life. She has learned much, too.

Wisdom comes with a developing sense of the world and the humans around us. She herself says, “Come and eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live and walk in the way of insight.” -- Amen