

Wisdom ~ March 15, 2009

Exodus 20:1-17; I Cor. 1:18-25; John 2:13-22; Psalm 19

As most of us grow older, we seem to attain a measure of wisdom. We grow in wisdom as we live through experiences in life and learn how to discern the direction in which we should move. Life is made up of trial and error. If we refuse to learn through our errors and failures we are doomed to repeat them. This can cause great pain and anguish.

There is a real sadness for people who cannot understand that what they might be doing is wrong. They are often caused to blunder over and over again in the same way hurting themselves and others around them.

Jesus told us that he had come to bring us “abundance of life.” We gain such abundance when we are able to sit down and take a good look at the way we are living, discover where it is we need improvement and then adjust our behavior to become better attuned to what it is we know God wants of us.

Enter the Ten Commandments. Rules cast in stone that many of us memorized in Sunday school or confirmation class. These rules were originally designed to help keep the Hebrew nation on the straight and narrow. They were created to help people develop an understanding of the proper way to lead their lives. They were given to Moses, our story tells us, to help give order to an early civilization that often struggled with order. The Ten Commandments were designed to make people stop and think before they acted. Through observing them people would begin to mature in their faith and in their understanding of God—they would begin to develop wisdom. That was the hope and the intent,

We know that our wisdom is never close to the wisdom of God. If we believe in God we understand God’s power. We know, too, that we are not God. We know that we cannot see into the hearts and minds of others and understand them completely. That doesn’t mean that we do not try. That does not mean that we do not use what limited wisdom and discernment we may possess to note what is going on all around us and to make intelligent observations based on what we see.

I have to smile a bit to myself when I consider Jesus being fed up with those who chose to use the temple for their own purposes—for making money for themselves. It was not unusual for there to be money changers around and those who sold sacrifices for offerings. They served a purpose. But there must have been a time, according to our story in the gospel of John, when these practices had just gone too far. There was a time to put an end to what Jesus saw as a misuse and abuse of the activities in the temple courtyard. This took a measure of experience, discernment and wisdom on the part of Jesus. He was a relatively young man, in his thirties, but he knew when enough was enough. The temple, as the church, was not and is not to be used for personal gain of any kind. That is not what the house of God is all about.

Those who chastised him completely misunderstood what he tried to tell them. He hoped to put things into proper perspective but they lacked the wisdom to understand.

The seeds of wisdom are planted within us throughout life.

One of those seeds is thoughtfulness--used in the way we regard life and in the way we regard other people. If we practice thoughtfulness in life, we discover that we do not

plunge into things before their time. Henry David Thoreau wrote: “It is characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.” Instead, we take a long and reasoned look at people and incidents in life and know that there is a reason for all the action and reaction we see around us. We try to understand what’s up. We take our time and consider what we want to do, as Jesus did when he considered the doings in the temple.

Another little seed is calmness of spirit. This can also be said to be a sense of inner peace. This is the ability to sit in a whirlwind and not have it draw us into it. Having calmness of spirit means that we have the knowledge that if we are able to remain centered in life, we will be able to figure things out logically and calmly before we act. We will not allow ourselves to be wounded by “the slings and arrows” of, sometimes, “outrageous fortune.” We understand that “this, too will pass” in spite of all our pushing and pulling, cajoling and threatening. There are things that are beyond our control. All our worry and fretting cannot help us move things around much or back into order. Charles Doss put it this way, “Wisdom in this world is serenity of spirit...It is a refusal to question the ways, the machinations, and the divine purposes of God. It is contentment. It is the willingness to abide cheerfully by the verdict of any court, of any jury, knowing full well that the true decision was handed down by God.”

Another important seed of wisdom is the understanding that we are a part of a much larger whole—we are a part of the universe, not the center of it. All of life is interlinked and deserves our respect. We have our rightful place and others have theirs. We are never to think more highly of ourselves than we do of anyone else. It is not all about us. We are just a grain of sand on the wide beach of the cosmos. That’s a humbling thought, or should be. Jesus understood this.

When we live without the benefit of wisdom, we look foolish. We jump to conclusions that are not true. We make assumptions that may only hurt us. We forget that we have many words of wisdom that exist for us in our scriptures and in other sources and we brush them aside in our desire to process things only through our own cloudy filters. We are human. But we are meant to keep on reaching beyond our limitations to discover what lies beyond us, within us and among us. We are meant to listen thoughtfully to the ideas and cautions of others and to respect what we hear. We are meant to observe all of life through the eyes and the mind of Christ. For us, this is the beginning of living lives full of wisdom.

-- Amen