

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Wise in Whose Eyes"
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Proper 15

Seeking wisdom is an elusive subject, particularly in the Summer where we seek rest and restoration, and many of the lighter things of life. Most of us do not spend much time thinking about how to become wise or whether we are wise. We probably have noted that wisdom does not come automatically with age and experience. Childishness and foolishness seem to be alive and well in all generations.

In academic circles, wisdom seems to be measured by your number of publications, the prestige of the institution where you work, and how highly you are sought on the lecture circuit. In business, wisdom seems to be how successful you have been in expanding your enterprises, making money, and making a name for your product or yourself.

Wisdom in the Bible is a much simpler, but perhaps more helpful notion. It is symbolized in Proverbs 9 by a woman calling out to potential clients from the highest, most visible place in the city. Unlike the sex trade worker who is nearby calling out for other reasons, she is there calling out to the simple and to the stunned alike, come over here and taste the feast I have prepared for you.

Once you come in to her house, you find that she was not lying to you for her personal gain, as others might. She has indeed prepared a feast for you to enjoy. And in the centre of the table, there is the fear of the LORD, both in Proverbs 9 and in Psalm 111. This fear is not merely shaking in your boots, but rather honouring God as God. It is a heartfelt devotion to God that goes beyond feelings to actions, ethical actions in line with one's words.

In 1 Kings, we read about Solomon being told that he could have anything he wanted in his grocery basket of life. He could have riches, he could have military and other power, he could have long life and health. But instead of asking for one of these, he thought more about helping others, and so he asked for wisdom and understanding to lead the people that God had given him. God was happy he made this decision and decided to not only give him the wisdom and understanding he needed, but also all those other things as well. And of course today, we speak of the wisdom of Solomon, one of the

wisest men in the history of the world. So I suppose the first thing we should learn from this is that God is pleased when we ask how we might serve him and his people, and how we might help one another.

Paul says in Ephesians 5:15-20, we should not be a slave to alcohol or drugs, but rather we should devote ourselves to the LORD, and understand what God's will is. In fact, the opposite of substance addiction is worshipping the Lord. There are many addictions that can kill our hearts and our minds and rob our lives and those from our loved ones. There are more "isms" than I can quote here: alcoholism, workaholism, drug addictions, sex addictions, video game and TV addictions, fantasy and romance reading addictions, perhaps you can add your own. Anything that steals your heart from the LORD, and turns it to something you cannot stop doing, no matter how hard you try, that is an addiction. It is an addiction, not in the scientific sense of how some crave narcotics or nicotine, but in the sense of addiction being the new idolatry. Addiction is a form of worship. And God wants our hearts to lean toward him, but often we run after other gods, small "g" like addictions. It's not that we try to run after other gods, it's that we naturally stray to these things, particularly if we have had painful memories and relationships, and difficulties in health and life.

I believe most people becoming ensnared in addictions do not have to think about the tragedies and abuse they have experienced. The pain of confronting the pain is often so great that we do not turn to God, but anywhere else. Wisdom, of course, is turning to God. Often there seem to be so many obstacles, inside us and outside us.

The outside ones are the common things you hear: "people are simply hypocrites in church," "nobody really cares for people in the church," or "church is simply another social club." The inside ones are more difficult to confront, such as "I don't want to change," "I am happy in my unforgiveness," or "I will never be a Christian the way I should be, so why should I even try?" Whether we have outside interference or inside interference, we should know that God wants us to be close to Him. Being close to him is like any other relationship, where we say "yes" to him, and we seek to get his opinion on our lives, as the Creator, he does have some good ideas.

In the gospel of John, we hear Jesus say some unusual things. He invites us to eat his body and drink his blood. Of course, no good Jewish person, let

alone Jesus, would be inviting us to experiment with cannibalism. He is the bread of life, the staple for us to experience everyday. We hunger spiritually for understanding our lives and living them in God's direction rather than our own. The manna in the Exodus history was the key symbol pointing us to the Messiah, Jesus, life from heaven, bread from heaven.

Jesus gives us himself, as the lamb was given for the sacrifice. The lamb would take away one person's sin. Jesus was given for all who would receive him. And so we come to a dividing point in the gospel of John. This was a "hard" teaching. "...Many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer followed him" after this. (John 6:66)

We too have a choice in following and accepting Jesus' way rather than our own. We too can choose to come to the table of the Lord, and eat and drink of God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, or not. Many are offended by this, and many are blessed. We must choose.

Wisdom in the end comes down to some simple choices, even though they might be difficult to make. Will we choose to be wise in our own eyes, someone else's or in the eyes of the Lord?

Let us pray.