



The Joys of Living Wisely

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost || August 18, 2024 || 9:30 am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Proper 15B || Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

I have had a wonderful week meeting members of the St. Andrew's community. I am grateful for the knowledge, history and wisdom that has been generously shared with me, and for the timing, as this morning we are treated to three readings that extol the virtues of Wisdom, and we are invited to seek Wisdom out in our own lives.

Let's begin our exploration of what God expects and what the gift of Wisdom is by considering the difference between Wisdom and knowledge. They are distinct. A sort of flippant definition of the difference is that *knowledge is knowing what to say. Wisdom is knowing when to say it.* Whether this is familiar to you or not, I want to spend time with the kernel of insight offered by this aphorism, which is the requirement of time.

Knowledge is something that does not require specific timing or an amount of time to acquire. Knowledge can be based on a series of facts, and these days, facts about nearly ANYTHING are at our fingertips! Knowing lots of facts, or having tons of information rattling around in our brains does not make us Wise. That is not wisdom.

Wisdom requires time to acquire and is a gift from God. (NB: – the simile ahead is a reflection of other gifts I received this week!)

If knowledge is like fresh tomatoes grown in our gardens, Wisdom is what that gorgeous garden fruit becomes when it has aged and been cooked, allowed to marinate and turned into sublime homemade spaghetti sauce. (I was treated to home grown and homemade spaghetti sauce this week, and it was the culinary summary of every great part of summer.)

We needn't dwell on Knowledge vs Wisdom with garden or vegetable metaphors for too long. The point is that creating spaghetti sauce from home grown tomatoes takes time. Time to plant the seed, water and dote on the plants, weed and protect the fruit and demonstrate gobs of patience so that you pick the tomatoes when they are ripe, and not a minute before.

We live in a society surrounded by messages about efficiency, doing things quickly, accomplishing more by “working smart” allowing nearly every moment of our calendars to be claimed by others, or by activities. Much of that productivity is wonderful, and can be educational. If you are lucky enough to go to an author’s talk or an art seminar, or even a newly released movie, those are great activities and may teach you something – you may acquire additional knowledge, but none of those efforts – or I would hazard to guess nothing currently scheduled on your calendars will enhance your wisdom. Perhaps you are a caregiver for a loved one with dementia or another chronic or debilitating illness. Doing that work, being a loving and supportive presence can be a beautiful extension of the Kingdom of God but this morning’s scripture suggests that engaging in that love fueled, God-centered work will not, in and of itself, give us Wisdom.

Developing wisdom takes time. It requires intention and as we have heard today, Wisdom is the key to a life rooted in God’s love, offering joys and eternal life.

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, we are reminded that making the most of the time we are given is not only what God expects, but is the outward expression of being filled with the Spirit.

With our summer vacations, visitors and travels rapidly coming to a close and our more frenetic Fall schedule within sight, this is the perfect moment to pray for and seek the gift of Wisdom.

God is asking us to attend to the experiences that we are having – to be intentional about the meetings, caregiving, playing, and our very busy lives to take a deep breath, a step back and to learn from and inwardly digest those experiences so that they may become gifts of Wisdom.

Do you have anyone in your life who automatically gives thanks to God for experiences good and bad? This is a recent practice that I am trying to emulate so that it becomes habit. Praying in thanksgiving for a heartbreak, with gratitude for a death in the family or even for being stuck in bumper to bumper traffic isn’t an easy practice, but the act of praying and giving thanks allows God to use our experience and transform it into a gift of Wisdom. Church is the perfect setting in which to marinate our experiences – both good and bad and those in between – church is a sacred setting in which to review and reflect on these experiences so that we may find and welcome the gift of Wisdom.

We are including a couple of opportunities in today’s service intended to give each of us a chance to reflect. After the Prayers of the People, we are going to participate in our corporate Confession of Sin. My understanding is that it has been a while since this was part of the worship service at St. Andrew’s so it may feel discomfiting. I have included it as an opportunity for Wisdom. This prayer of confession is said all over the world in churches of every

circumstance, in hundreds of languages, with the shared belief that each of us has definitely messed up in some way, either by doing something, or by neglecting to do something loving God with our whole hearts.

My experience of the confession is that it is an incredible invitation, equalizer and opportunity for liberation and Wisdom. I'll pray the same words and review some of my shortcomings from this week, as you do the same (thinking about your own – hopefully not distracted by mine! 😊.) I think about this chorus of contrite voices reaching God's ears as a cacophony of assurance that we will strive to do better in the week to come, and I imagine our words and act of Confession delight God.

The other reflective space included in this service is a few minutes of silence after this sermon. Two minutes can feel like an eternity, or perhaps it will make you antsy to get to the Creed. Whatever your reaction, my hope is that you can reframe and USE those few precious minutes to reflect. Reflect on your week or what you've heard here and consider ways in which you might take on the tasks in your life with an eye toward gaining Wisdom.

Please know you have a standing invitation to reflect with me directly about how these additions to our service impact your worship experience. Do you find it valuable? Can you use these brief asides to good internal use? Does the quiet just amplify your internal grocery list? Let me know.

We are definitely careening toward the end of summer, AND we are being commanded to lay aside our immaturity and to walk in wisdom and insight. I hope that each of us will return to this sanctuary week after week with the blessed assurance that Wisdom can be found here. Quiet, contemplative reflection is part of what we do in this community, and investing precious time is the required ingredient for receiving the Gift of Wisdom. Amen+