

## The Getting of Wisdom

Solomon's prayer for wisdom is a beautiful opening speech to his public life – filled with humility, readiness to lead well and justly, and the deep desire to be who God wanted him to be. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our politicians gave maiden speeches like this? And in this he provides a model of what we should pray for in our search for right and good and fulfilling living.

Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible is more to be desired than much fine gold. This theme runs through the psalms, the proverbs, the story of Job and others. Indeed the Hebrew Bible is regarded as being in three parts: the Law; the Prophets; and the Wisdom writings.

Not only are prayers such as Solomon's self evidently beautiful of mind and spirit but they are part of the all important context of Jesus as a teacher. Increasingly we (that is biblical scholars) understand that Jesus was a teacher out of the Wisdom tradition. He taught in parables and aphorisms – using folk tales, the well known rabbinical stories, and simple agricultural and everyday images – to convey deep and eternal truths about life: the search for wisdom and the fulfilling of one's life purpose, and the right relationship with God and neighbour. If we were to remove these wisdom sayings and teaching we would have very little written in red in our pew sheets or bibles!

So in trying to hold together the very different and widespread readings of this morning I want to suggest just three things about wisdom and the getting of it.

But firstly let me explore with you what wisdom might be, in biblical terms, because spiritual wisdom is not necessarily the same as knowledge, particularly intellectual knowledge. We all instinctively know that wisdom and cleverness do not always coincide!

Wisdom is personified as a woman to be sought after in the writings ascribed to Solomon later in his life, after he has dedicated, successfully, a whole life time to seeking wisdom.

*“There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.*

*For wisdom is more mobile than any motion;*

*because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.*

*For she is a breath of the power of God,*

*and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;*

*therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.*

Prepared by Rev'd Sue Lodge-Calvert for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost 24<sup>th</sup> July 2011 Denmark-Walpole  
Based on 1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:129-136; Romans 8:26-39; and Matthew 13:44-58

*For she is a reflection of eternal light,  
a spotless mirror of the working of God,  
and an image of his goodness.*

*Although she is but one, she can do all things,  
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;  
in every generation she passes into holy souls  
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;  
for God loves nothing so much as the person who loves with wisdom.*

*She is more beautiful than the sun,  
and excels every constellation of the stars.*

*Compared with the light she is found to be superior,  
for it is succeeded by the night,  
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.*

*She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other,  
and she orders all things well.*

*(Wisdom of Solomon 7:22 – 8:1)*

Desirable indeed! And understandably a spirit, a life force, a source, that is to be sought with body, mind and spirit – with all that we are and all that we have!

The three things that I believe are inherent in our teaching this morning about our search for wisdom, are: that wisdom (not wealth, success etc) must be our priority; that the desire for wisdom comes from us and from the spirit of God within us longing for what is right; and that wisdom lies buried in the everydayness of where we find ourselves.

It is seen to be good by God that Solomon asks first for what will make him a good, just, merciful leader – a servant of God and the people – before or rather than asking for personal gain. That wisdom – in it's expanded meaning of intelligence, holiness, our uniqueness, love of goodness, keenness, beneficence, humanity, steadfastness, sureness, freedom from anxiety, our ability to see the big picture and to penetrate others thoughts and motives – is the goal of our life's work. And God, seeing that Solomon has the right priority, then assures him that wealth and health will flow his way. And Solomon is remembered as the great king, the wise king, as more successful than his father in many ways.

And the parables this morning remind us that we are to make the wisdom of God, a right relationship with God, the pearl of great value, our highest priority. So much so that we would give up all that we have to gain it.

But sometimes we desire what we desire rather than what we know we should desire! Or as St Paul says, we do not know how to pray as we ought. For those of us who struggle to have the priorities we know we should we can be assured that even when we do not know what to ask for

(and isn't that most of the time?) we can trust that the Spirit of God, within us, is desiring on our behalf, what is for our good.

I don't know about you but I have sometimes looked back, that cheap version of wisdom called hindsight!, and been so grateful that God didn't answer – or answered in the negative – something I had earnestly, desperately even, prayed for. That relationship without which my life's purpose would not be met or even worth living I am now so grateful didn't work out! That job which I was pretty sure was meant for me, thank God, I didn't get it! Or I wouldn't be here with you! Or the time of pain and loss out of which some unexpected blessing came. All things work for good for those who love God.

And our parables this morning have a sense of God's treasure being buried in the ordinary around us. Buried in the field, lying waiting among other pearls of lesser value, swimming with the good and the non edible fish of the sea. Wisdom is both in clear sight in the ordinary, and in another sense it is hidden underneath the ordinary and needs some digging to get to, some scanning and discerning looking to see, and some sorting to weed out what is of true value and what is of lesser value. Wisdom is both a gift and the result of work.

The good news therefore is that wisdom, while subtle and on the move, is there to be found in the everyday of our lives. Wisdom is to be found in tending our gardens, in keeping in contact with our loved ones, in listening to our neighbours struggles and successes, in serving strangers in the Op Shop, in loving tenderly and strongly those given us in this life, in singing of God's goodness in the choir, in reading books, in listening to interviews, in listening to our own hearts in the night, in building new objects of beauty, in knowing when something is finished with and recycling it, in sharing our own story, in embroidering our grandmother's advice above the mantlepiece, in researching our family history and seeing the gift and the folly that is our inheritance, and in working on the inheritance we shall leave our great grandchildren. Wisdom is within finger tip touch to those who look with hearts informed by the love of God.

Even so, come Lord Jesus Christ.