

The contemporary Collect which is set for this Sunday 11th after Trinity reminds us that in our searching, we need to lay aside those things which prevent us from seeing and contributing to the vision of the Kingdom of God. It is an interesting prayer as we consider what it is to live in God's wisdom.

I have thought a lot about wisdom this week in the conversations I have had and the challenges that have crossed my path. Sometimes this has been conversations about wisdom relating to hopes and dreams; sometimes it has been a little more contemplative as we process the many challenges that face our world and community – and our desire to have it all fit together like a great crime novel – when in fact the world and life rarely fits together so simply. How do we live with the complexities of life, and seek wisdom in a way that brings lasting change rather than immediate fulfilment or even self-satisfaction that does not last? Wisdom is often much harder than we might like it to be.

The biblical image of wisdom is very powerful and invites us to listen for the whole of creation and to live life to its fullest with all the potential that God

has offered. The challenge of this image so often is not in the image offered itself; but rather in the way that it has been applied by much of humanity. Sadly, so often wisdom is seen as a correct perspective and can therefore be abused to bully or even dominate another who has a different perspective. Sadly too, wisdom is often confused with learning – and this has created an unhelpful hierarchy. When we are teaching wisdom as a virtue; we describe it as *knowledge or truth of what is right expressed as a just action*. It is not enough to know something; we need to know how to express it. Wisdom as we know is also about the ability to understand that others have something to contribute; that there is knowledge beyond ourselves; others who may know better than us; or may contribute something more to the conversation. Wisdom may come from those whom we find challenging or are very different from ourselves.

Today we hear a beautiful passage from Proverbs 9 which in many ways presents wisdom; or understanding as a thing to be desired. The invitation to the feast which is described has taken much preparation and thought; and will have

consequences for the persons whole life – by attending the person chooses a life that embraces wisdom¹. This continues much of the purpose of Proverbs which encourages ethical living. I find this passage however very powerful because it so powerfully links the image of wisdom and life. It is a thing to be desired; a hope to be aspired to; and a gift from God which we are all invited to embrace.

Wisdom is not just a subject at the heart of Proverbs. It is also found in the ongoing discourse in John's gospel as today we continue our journey through John 6. In the image of the living bread of Jesus, we also encounter and find understanding – not only about Jesus but about our own hearts and the hearts of others.

This is now our third week of readings from John 6, all of which relate to Jesus as the bread of life. It is phrase that we rattle off quickly, but it has so much depth that those who write our lectionary understand that we need at least 5 weeks to unpack it! All throughout John 6, Jesus has tried to help us embrace that God's *wisdom* - is not so

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-20-2/commentary-on-proverbs-91-6-5>

much knowledge to be explained and understood as it is relationship to be trusted and embraced. Jesus no longer speaks of “belief in,” as we find in chapter 3, but of “the one who eats me” (verse 57)². For eternal life does not come through understanding correctly or believing the right things. Eternal life is being in close communion with Jesus. Eternal life is to remain in Jesus and to have Jesus remain in us. We take Jesus into ourselves, we become intimate, and the closer we become to Jesus, and we in turn become closer to God.

In the context of John, wisdom is about relationship. If we then are seeking a relationship with God in which we might share in God’s wisdom, we also hear the vision in Proverbs – wisdom is something that is life-giving – like our relationship with God – not something that takes away from others; or creates power over; or fear within. Our wisdom needs to be one which is collective, relational and invites each of us to grown in faith with God.

The point of the Eucharist is that we share intimately with and in Jesus together. It is not

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2552

about our individual wisdom or discernment, but about our unity and collective struggle to live a life of faith. When we hear the voice of God we have others to help us unpack what it might mean.

When we encounter the spirit we have others to share in that joy. When we struggle with the questions and paradox's which confront our lives, we do not confront them alone. When we cry out, God where are you, we are held by those who stand around the altar with us. When we look at the problems of the world, we don't ignore them – we bring them into communion and ask God together.

Proverbs reminds us that we are all invited to the banquet. The image which Jesus presents to the crowds after he feeds them is of a relationship which is not in isolation, and one that doesn't allow for individual control. Rather in its intimacy it draws accountability in the most perfect of moments - when all people, throughout all time and space, stand in unity around an altar and share in Jesus body – that is we are all held together in one moment, in one accountability, in one love.

So, what wisdom do we seek at present – for ourselves and for our community? A good future, peace on earth, and end to environmental destruction, and end to the violence and poverty that leads to homelessness and refugees? Maybe the wisdom we seek is more personal, a good marriage, or A level results, or choices about our future? Our dreams and hopes – which so often inform the wisdom we seek - are as individual as we are; and yet it is our collective wisdom and hope that will transform the world. Whatever wisdom we seek at present, God invites us to share them intimately as we come to the altar and share in the bread of life; and to recognise that wisdom, like all else takes a relationship with solid foundations – which recognises and gives thanks for what is achieved and listens for where we are being led.

In the end, the passage from the letter to the Ephesians set for today says this better than I ever could: (Ephesians 5: 15-20)

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time you have. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of God is. Do not get drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts. Giving thanks to God at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen