

WISDOM
Pastor Steven Molin

CLLC
May 13, 2018

Easter 7
Psalm 1

Dear friends in Christ, grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, at the local Catholic monastery, the priests would line up each morning waiting for the bishop to greet them. He would pass through the chapel, and as he did, the brothers would all call out in unison, (singing) "Good morning bishop." and he would nod to them. Every morning, it was always the same; "Good morning bishop." And he would nod.

But then one day, a new priest moved into the monastery. And when the bishop arrived, all of the brothers chanted, as they always did, "Good morning bishop," except the new guy. He chanted, "Good evening bishop." Suddenly there was silence. The bishop stopped in his tracks, looked at the gaggle of priests and responded, (*singing*) "Someone chanted evening!"

At a former congregation, I would always walk in to the sanctuary prior to the contemporary service and would greet the band. "Good morning, Music!" I wouldn't chant it, I'd just say it with joy: "Good morning, Music!" And every week, they would say "good morning" back to me. Until one week. One week, I walked in and said, "Good morning Music" and the whole band called back to me, "Good morning, Wisdom." And every week after that, it was always the same: "Good morning Music! Good morning Wisdom!" They called me "Wisdom."

This sermon is not about whether I have wisdom; my high school teachers could weigh in on that question. Rather, this is message about wisdom itself. For the better part of my life, I had always thought of wisdom, as something possessed by the smartest person in any room, or, the eldest person in any family or in any church. But then I stumbled upon a simple portrayal of wisdom, and it is this:

Wisdom can be gathered.
Wisdom can be learned, or gained.
Wisdom cannot be taught.

Can I say that again? *Wisdom can be gathered. Wisdom can be learned, or gained. But wisdom cannot be taught.* In short, wisdom is a gift given over time, gained through life experiences, failures and successes, and applied to ones way of life. I would say it this way, *Wisdom is having a sense of saying or doing the right thing at the right time*

For example, President Abraham Lincoln's profound words at the end of the Civil War;

*With malice toward none, with charity for all...
let us strive on to finish the work we are in,
to bind up the nation's wounds¹*

That's wisdom.

In 1855, Per Cederstam was the young and inexperienced second pastor of Chisago Lake Lutheran Church. He walked into a congregation divided, by where to build the first church. On his own, without authorization from the leadership, he went to the owner of THIS property and offered Mr. Mobeck \$50 of his own money for his land. When a church leader questioned him about the high price he paid, Pastor Cederstam replied, "If we can win unity by it, it is not too much."²

That's wisdom.

Marsha's aunt Joyce raised three rambunctious boys in California in the 1950's. When they were just toddlers, one of the rascals climbed into his mother's lap and asked, "Mommy, which one of us do you love the most?" Joyce replied, "Whichever one of you is sick and needs me the most."

That's wisdom.

An African proverb says this; "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

That's wisdom.

So why all this talk of wisdom today; on Mother's Day, on this Anniversary Day of our congregation? It is because there are five types of psalms in our bible. There are Praise psalms, and Royal psalms, and Thanksgiving psalms, and Lament psalms. But of the 150 psalms, nine of them are called Wisdom Psalms. Wisdom psalms do not tell us how to be successful, or religious, or popular, or rich. Wisdom psalms tell us how to live a contented life. *Go this way, and you will be happy. Go that way and you will be miserable.* And Psalm 1, the psalm we just read, is the first and best of the wisdom psalms. Here's how it begins:

¹ Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865

² *150 Years of Ministry*, William Johnson, Emeory Johnson, Eunice Johnson Anderson, 2003, Kirk House Publ.

Psalm 1:1

Happy are those

who do not follow the **advice** of the wicked,
or take the **path** that sinners tread,
or sit in the **seat** of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord

There are a hundred sermons in that one verse, but I want to focus on just three words; share a comment about each, and then wrap this up. You can follow along on the small yellow sheet.

*Happy are those who do not follow the **advice** of the wicked.* If you have ever followed some bad advice then you will see the wisdom of this word. Because wicked people tend to offer advice that only best serves them. I know that's a black and white statement, but following someone's advice is all about trust. Just ask someone who invested their retirement savings with Bernie Maddoff or Tom Petters, right?

I bought a used car once from a very slick salesperson. The car seemed solid, drove really nice, and the price was great. When I was signing the contract, my smarmy sales guy says, "And this comes with an Oklahoma Guarantee." When I asked him what an Oklahoma Guarantee was, he said, "If you drive away and the car breaks in half, I guarantee you own both halves." He chuckled, I drove away, and a month later, the motor froze up. Who do you go to for counsel on the most important issues of your life? I hope it's someone you know, and love and trust. And that would be wise advice.

The psalmist writes, *Happy are those who do not take the **path** that sinners tread.* Sometimes, we don't know which way to go. In our naivety we may follow someone down a dangerous road, and I have heard it said that Christians are among the most trusting and gullible of all. What did Jesus say? "*I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as snakes and innocent as doves.*" But how do you know who is safe?

I love what Mister Rogers once said. "My mother told me that, in times of fear or tragedy, always look for the helpers." They will be the ones standing on the edge, the moms, the police officers, the first responders; you can trust them." That's wisdom.

Finally, *Happy are those who do not sit in the **seat of scoffers**.* Do you know the scoffers? The naysayers? The gossipers? They are those who want nothing to do with kindness, or justice or love. They just want to complain. And their talk can be

intoxicating, can't it? I mean, it's always easier criticizing what is, than seeking what could be. It's always more comfortable perpetuating a falsehood than standing up for the truth.

A long time ago, someone gave me some insight into handling gossip. What do you do when you hear a juicy story and are tempted to pass it on to someone else? This is when friend introduced me to the gossip test. He said, *Before sharing the story with someone else, ask yourself three questions:*

Is it true?

Is it kind?

Is it necessary to pass on?

That's what wisdom would lead us to do.

Well, lots of words to ponder, and yet there are many things to celebrate today. Thank you Mom! Thank you church founders. Thank you Swedes. Thank you people of Chisago Lake Lutheran Church: for your love, and your faith, and your wisdom. And thanks be to God. Amen.

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