

The story is told of an American tour guide in Italy after WWII who would always take his groups to an alley where a young boy stayed. He would show the group a curious thing: he would offer the little boy the choice between a nickel and a dime, and the little boy would always choose the larger coin, the nickel. The tourists got a kick out of the boy's ignorance, and they also would offer the boy that choice. Without fail, the little boy would choose the nickels. One day, months later, the tour guide decided that he ought to tell the boy the truth. Before he could get the words out, the boy said to him, “Oh, I know the nickel is worth less than the dime, but if I were ever to choose the dime, you would stop offering me any money!” That young boy had wisdom! (Source unknown)

Wisdom. Who among us has not wished for wisdom? Should you take that job? Marry that person? Make a change? Should you stay in your home or go and live with your children? What is best? What is wise? The parent yearns to know how to help his/her child when there is pain or a struggle. The spouse tries to choose appropriate words when the marital relationship is in difficulty. The friend who is standing beside another who is in crisis struggles for wisdom. What to say? What to do? How to help? On many levels, being wise is figuring out what is best.....

As the Olympics ended this past week, there have been reports of some of the medalists who stand to make millions of dollars by having their pictures on cereal boxes and giving endorsements to other products. One winner of four gold medals in swimming, though, Missy Franklin, has decided not to make endorsements, but instead to remain an amateur so that she can swim on her high school's swimming team. It must have been a hard choice. Millions of dollars as a sure thing right now, or the hope that in four years Missy may be able to win the Olympic contests again? Missy and her parents have chosen for Missy to remain with her classmates doing what she loves to do. A hard and hopefully wise decision.

Friday night on the national news there was a woman who lives in one of the western states devastated by forest fires. She was quite distraught as she stood before the camera and said that they were being told to evacuate their home. She looked into the camera and asked, “You have twenty minutes; what do you take?” Crises force us to look at things in new light. If you had twenty minutes to load into one car the important things in your home, knowing that everything you left would be destroyed, what would you take?

I thought about this. My family, my dogs and cats. Pictures of my parents and our kids growing up. If I could manage it, the portable hard drive on which I have a lot of stuff, including pictures, stored. But most of the stuff is not so important, not in the priority-demanding light of a real crisis. Perhaps it takes a crisis to help us get in touch with wisdom, to see what is really important.

Wisdom. Long ago in ancient Athens, a friend told the philosopher, Socrates, that he - Socrates - was surely the wisest man in all of Athens. Socrates protested that he could not possibly be the

wisest man in town because he knew nothing. To prove his point, he took his friend around the city to talk with persons Socrates was sure were wiser than he was. A strange thing happened: As he talked with these learned individuals, Socrates began to see that even though they professed to know a great deal, when they were questioned about *how* they knew that the source of their knowledge was true, or how they could prove their beliefs, they had no answer. In fact, the more they talked the less they seemed to know, even though each thought himself to know a lot. After this, Socrates concluded that even though he himself knew nothing, he *was* the wisest man in Athens, because he was actually able to realize how very little he really knew. Wisdom!

When God offered Solomon anything he wanted, Solomon actually showed that he had a lot of wisdom when he asked for wisdom. For when God gave Solomon the chance to ask for whatever he wanted as ruler of Israel, Solomon did not ask for riches or power, but for wisdom to lead the people; the ability to see clearly, to see life more as God sees it.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus declared himself to be "Living Bread" which leads to eternal life and everlasting blessing, and he contrasted what he offered with the bread that was eaten by the Jews in the wilderness, which gave them only temporary sustenance. Jesus challenged the folks of his day, and us, with these words: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (vs. 53) To do this is more than simply to take communion on the first Sunday of the month. It is to receive into our hearts Jesus' self-giving, to let the message proclaimed in John 3:16, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him may not perish, but have everlasting life.... For Jesus came into this world not to condemn us, but to save us!" To eat of him is to claim his death and his power over death, for our sake....

He came to save us... When this truth fills our hearts, Jesus becomes our Savior, and we have life, no matter what! I can love others because my Savior has loved me... I can forgive others because he has forgiven me.... We feed on him in faith, and our lives are different.

This past Wednesday during the Bible study, we had a "wisdom" experience. We had just read passage in Matthew, chapter 25, where Jesus gave his followers a heads-up about what's going to be on our "final exam" at the last Judgment. It's the story of the separation of the Sheep and the Goats. The Sheep were commended for helping Jesus when he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison. And the Goats were condemned for NOT helping Jesus when he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison. Both groups reacted with surprise, "Lord, *when* did we see you and either help or not help you??" And Jesus replied, "When you did it for one of the least of humanity, you did it for me."

Well, we had just read this challenging parable when a young man walked into the fellowship hall and asked if anybody had any spare change! Jesus' warning seemed to walk right into our midst in human form! The young man ended up sharing our snacks and some of our Bible study, and then he had to go. For those of us who were there on Wednesday, the timing of his visit and our own reactions to it have made this parable even more gripping and challenging than it seemed before. I believe that our Living Lord blessed us big-time Wednesday morning!

Each of us has been given life. In your life, good things happen, bad things happen. Through it all, God is with us, whether we realize it or not. Wisdom comes when we ask God to help us see what God would have us see about our lives and about the needs of those around us. When we claim God as our Help and our Strength, and realize that we need something bigger than ourselves, we are wise. (pause)

Long ago a young man was being interviewed for the job of piloting a steamboat on the Mississippi River, The interviewer, concerned that the applicant was too young to know the dangers of the river, asked if he knew where all the rocks were. To this the young man replied, “No sir, I do not know where all the rocks are. But I do know where they are not.” He got the job. (From *Illustrations Unlimited*, p. 489)

How is it for us, today? We can see some of the rocks. We can see what frightens us, what threatens to sink us in life, those things that we cannot seem to handle. But do we know how to proceed *wisely*, to move through the tough times? What does it LOOK LIKE to be living with wisdom today?

Jesus showed us. At one time our world seemed content with the rule of law and justice: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. There must be punishment to fit the crime. But God’s way of looking at life - according to Jesus - is way beyond our attempts to get even. In Christ we see one who insisted on loving and forgiving. Our Shepherd laid down his life for others, even when the others did not deserve or understand it. To have the gift of wisdom is to start seeing life from God’s perspective as given us in Jesus, and to be willing to let go of our own more limited ways.

But that’s not easy!. Somebody hurts you, and it’s only natural to want to get back at them. Even though Jesus responded to his cruel mistreatment and crucifixion with “Father, forgive them,” it’s really tough for us when the “mean guys” seem to be winning the game and we continue to struggle. But the deep wisdom God offers promises us that we really may trust God, no matter how bad things are or what is falling apart in our lives. We may know that God really is right here with us, that God really does love us, and that God absolutely has a larger and better plan than any of us can see.... Those Everlasting Arms will not drop us, and in fact they will lead us into abundant and everlasting life. Wisdom.

The world jerks us around and often causes us to become people we do not want to be. Jesus offers something different. I paraphrase his call to us: “Come to me, all you who are having a tough time; the work I offer you will give you wholeness and peace.” (Matthew 11:28, loosely read)

Years ago, a man returning home from a business trip brought his wife some souvenirs. Among them was a matchbox that was supposed to glow in the dark. After she opened it, they turned out the light to see the thing glow, but it didn’t. “Something’s wrong,” the woman said, “it doesn’t glow at all.” The man thought that he had been cheated. Then his wife noticed some French words on the bottom of the box. Taking the box to a friend who knew French, she was

told that it said, “If you want me to shine at night, keep me in the sunlight all day.” So the woman set her gift in a south window. That evening, the matchbox offered a brilliant glow when the lights were turned off. (*Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Michael Green).

We are not so different from that matchbox. If we want to have the glow of God’s love and God’s wisdom within us, we must let ourselves be exposed to God: through the stories and teachings of the Bible, through the hymns of our faith, by the prayers we offer in church and all through the minutes of our lives. We are exposed to God through one another as we respond to needs and share with each other what we have come to understand about God in our lives. By this, we will feed on our Lord and come to see what is important in life. By this, God’s way for us will become clear. By this, the light of God given to us in Jesus Christ will shine through our lives into this dark and needy world. May it be so! LET US PRAY:

Dear God, you know where we struggle to see and to understand, and where we find it challenging to love others and even more difficult to trust you. Please fill us with your wisdom and help us to open our hearts to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.