



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

What is Wisdom_ What is Purpose__ - The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost - 8_14_2022

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

About two weeks ago, I came home from some time away. Part of it was vacation, I drove my eldest child's car to Los Angeles from Detroit, which was an epic journey that will never be repeated again. And then I went into an intensive week-long program that is part of a graduate degree that I'm getting from the University of Michigan. It was 14 hours a day for six days. And it was intense. And the average age in this program is 40. And in two weeks I turned 57. I didn't quite feel enough like Robert de Niro in *The Intern*, but it was close. It was pretty exhausting.

Claire picked me up on Saturday afternoon and I decided, let's go to church, because I wanted to be at church. And being at church here at Christ Church Cranbrook is one of the things that gives me joy. You were all having church outside and Father Chris was preaching. And so we snuck around to the back thinking I could keep kind of out of sight and be able to go to church and enjoy it.

But during the service, these two cars pulled into the parking lot. And this group of young men spill out and they start to drink and they start to yell and they start to just bro out right on the parking lot. Just acting like fools. And I decided initially I was like, well, I'm just going to let it go because I'm still on vacation. But then when one of them went to the edge of the parking lot and began to relieve himself, I said, that's it, it's on.

And so I got up and I walked over to them. I've had many of these confrontations and there always is a little bit of escalation. And so I said, "Hey, you got to go." And they said, "Why?" I said, "Because it's private property, we're having a service. You're making a lot of noise." "It's not private property. It's public property. I live right next door." I said, "I'm the pastor. This is private property. It's owned by the church. You've got to go." And I said, "You can't urinate here." He said, "We're not urinating here." I said, "Look right over there." And curiously, his friend was still going. I don't know. It was just unbelievable.

He turned and he saw, and he turned back to me and he said, "I didn't know he was doing that." And I, for some reason, decided that I would let my shoulders drop. Instead of getting angrier or more assertive, I decided for some reason, I'd let my shoulders drop. And I said to him, I do this every weekend and it's

exhausting. And then he did something that I haven't seen ever before. He immediately apologized. And then his friends came over and they all apologized. Then one of them said, "We're going to a concert and we just wanted to have a little bit of fun. And I'm really sorry about this. We'll move." And they got into their cars and they drove away. And then I went back to the service.

So the next day was Sunday, but because I had gone to church on Saturday and I was off, I went to the gym. And surprisingly, a lot of people go to the gym on Sunday mornings. I exercise and then I go to Starbucks to get my mother her coffee, because that's what I do in the little rituals of our lives, I bring her coffee in the morning. I walk into the Starbucks and there are the same guys wearing the same clothes they had on the night before, looking incredibly fresh, given what they must have been doing. They're eating breakfast, fine. I went up and I said, kind of, "Hello," and they invited me to sit with them. They asked me questions about my life and questions about the work I do. I found out a little bit about them. And then as we left, we shook hands. And it could not have been a nicer exchange.

As I was mulling over this over the past few days, I've been thinking to myself, is this what it feels like to get wiser? Is this what wisdom looks like? I'm at that point in my life now that I know what it's like to get older. On Friday, I had to go see an eye doctor because I needed to get reading glasses. I got to the intensive week, I opened up the textbook and I couldn't read it. No anxiety there. And as she was getting me fitted for the bifocals, I said to her, "You know what's good about getting old?" And she said, "What?" I said, "Nothing, you just start to fall apart." And she said, "Well, you know what's good about dying young?" I said, "You've heard this before, I guess?"

Now getting old and getting wise are different, aren't they? We can all get a bit older, whether we like it or not, and if we're lucky we will. But wisdom is something different. Wisdom is a kind of choice we make. So the first question I have for today is to invite you to ask yourself what is wisdom? The roots of the word wisdom in English come from a root that says old, wise, wisdom, old English. But the ultimate roots of wisdom are from the Latin *sapientia*, which means the ability to discern, to see reality. That seems to be the first part of what it means to be wise.

We see that in our reading today from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is warning people against false prophets who engage in a lot of talk about dreams. And of course, to the people of God in that time and place, they were experiencing incredible difficulty. And so these dreams of prosperity, these dreams of a return to glory for Israel, these things were good news to people. They wanted to hear it. But Jeremiah said they were not truly wise prophets

because of that. They are false profits because the profit is called to see things as they are, to name reality and to be faithful to it.

Another thing that I think happens with wisdom is the ability to ask the question why. This question can get us into trouble, can't it, when we ask the question "why"? In fact there is an animal behavioralist that's written a book recently that argues that humans when they ask the question "why" get into conflict. That's one of the reasons why our brains are different from animal brains. But there is a silver lining to asking why, says the behavioralist, because there are certain collective things that we can do together that help us to see and walk together and work together and cooperate with each other.

And animals can only work by association. They can't ask the question why. And as an example, the behavioralist asked us to consider, even though YouTube sometimes tells us differently. "Imagine," he said, "a group of humans on a flight. Usually we all cooperate. We usually will all help each other, because we all know the answer to the question why we're on the plane. We're on our way somewhere. If you had put," he said, "chimpanzees on the same flight, they would sooner or later rip each other's earlobes off and body parts would be all over. Blood would be everywhere. There'd just be just incessant violence, because they cannot ask the question "why."

So one of the things some people would say is that we find wisdom when we ask the question "why," and that puts us into the space of wonder, which is why wisdom can sometimes be aligned with wonder. So seeing things as they are, and being able to ask the question "why" is what many people will tell you is the path to wisdom. And it's part of what makes us human. After all, we are homo sapiens. We are hominids who have *sapientia*. We have the ability to discern.

And much of what we would find in the scriptures would go with the grain of that, because the Word was written for us who are human beings. But the Bible has a different definition of wisdom, something that adds to that ability to see things as they are and to ask the question "why." The ultimate answer to the question of what is wisdom in the scriptures is that it is Jesus. St. Paul writes in I Corinthians that on the Cross, Christ showed us the wisdom and power of God, "For the message of the cross, he writes, is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is like giving." And the message of the Cross reveals to us a Christ who is able through weakness to find strength, a Christ who through suffering is to reconcile us to God, a Christ whose love knows no bounds, which is why that Christ can sacrifice Himself for us.

So for the scriptures, Christ is, Paul writes, the power and the wisdom of God. And if we are to truly know what wisdom is, we have to look at things through the lens of that Cross of Christ. What does wisdom mean for you? This is the question we all have to ask. It doesn't matter how old we are, because if there's one thing that is in short supply these days, it is wisdom. We have a lot of

opinions. We have a lot of strong feelings. We have a lot of conflict, but we don't have a lot of wisdom. And today's gospel invites us to see what wisdom is.

That word in I Corinthians, that Christ is the power and the wisdom of God, that word also brings us to the second question I want to ask you to see today, which is what is power? And power in the scriptures is defined as a kind of purpose. We see that in both Jeremiah and in our reading today from the Gospel of Luke, when Jeremiah says in the word you find fire, and in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus says, I have come to bring fire. In Luke, it is the Greek *por*, which is also part of the prefix *pur* in purpose. The fire that drives is what helps you continue when things get difficult, when opposition arises.

And so when Jesus encourages us to find the fire in our lives, to choose God, that is an invitation for us to find our purpose. And oftentimes when we look at things through the lens of the Cross of Christ, not only is wisdom changed, but also power is changed. Because when power is aligned with purpose, that usually means something is let go of. Something is surrendered. Something is sacrificed. Something is transcended. Something is bracketed. That chapter in my life is now closed. I will begin today with new purpose because I know why I am on my way, and I know the way that I am on.

So the question I have for you is what is purpose? One of the things that I had to answer on the orientation, they asked us to say, what is your purpose in seeking this degree? I thought, well, it's a little late now, I've already put down the deposit, but I'll play this game because I'm going to get everything I can out of it. And I wrote that my purpose in life is to grow in my relationship with God, to serve and love my family, to honor the covenantal obligations that I have with this congregation, and to complete this degree. After that, sky's the limit. But those three things give me purpose. And to say that allowed me to let go of anything that would stand in the way of stepping forward, and to be clear in what I want.

Now, as you answer this question for yourself, what is purpose, you might think also about what we have written in our reading today from Hebrews, that incredible march of faith. Anybody who reads the Bible knows a little bit about the story that is being mentioned in the book of Hebrews today, that march through time of Samson and Gideon and Jephthah, and going through all these people who had been faithful, it's almost like a compressed cultural code that is meant to convey to us the weight of glory that we are walking on as we make our way to Christ.

But if you read the Bible closely, you will know that every one of those saints that are named, struggled. They had things they had to let go of. They had great temptations they felt prey to. They had incredible mistakes that they made. They were all too human. And so the faith that they had, the faith that sanctified them was a faith that was a gift from God that allowed them to find wisdom and

purpose in what they were doing. And the last line from today's reading from Hebrews is one I want to leave with you as you think about these questions, what is wisdom for me, what is purpose for me? Which is from the 12th chapter.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that clings so closely. Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."

Hallelujah. Lay aside every weight, everything that separates you from God as you seek this purpose that God is calling you too. Lay aside and let go of every moment that keeps you from stepping into that wisdom that is revealed through the Cross of Christ. When do you have to let your shoulders drop and begin again?

Amen,.