

“Wisdom: A Divine Gift”

Rev. Dr. Scott Paczkowski

It’s kind of hard to preach on wisdom, when you don’t always have a lot of it; so I turned to people who seem to have a lot more than I do. I turned to children, because they often have more wisdom than we adults. I found words of wisdom in the voices of children:

- Never trust a dog to watch your food. – Patrick, age 10
- When your dad is mad and asks you, “Do I look stupid?” don’t answer him. – Michael, age 14
- Never tell your mom her diet’s not working. – Michael, age 14
- Stay away from prunes. – Randy, age 9
- Never allow your three-year-old brother in the same room as your school assignment. – Traci, age 14
- Puppies still have bad breath, even when you’ve given them a Tic Tac. – Andrew, age 9
- Never hold a Dust Buster and a cat at the same time. – Kyoyo, age 9
- You can’t hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk. – Amira, age 9
- If you want a kitten, ask for a horse. – Naomi, age 15
- Felt tip markers are not good to use as lipstick. – Lauren, age 9
- Don’t pick on your sister when she’s holding a baseball bat. – Joe, age 10
- Never try to baptize a cat. – Eileen, age 8

I love their sense of what wisdom is, because it’s true. If you try every one of those things, they are not going to work.

So, I was looking at other places [sources] for what I could find [out] about wisdom and I came across Albert Einstein. Albert Einstein said he began life in a seeking out of wisdom, with a profound faith in social good of the scientific enterprise. But, he soon learned by watching German scientists hand over that scientific enterprise to the fascists, that the common good is not always found within scientific understanding. He watched chemists and physicists become creators of weapons of mass destruction that were attempted to be used in the most unfaithful, unjust ways. So Einstein said that we must see figures, such as Gandhi, Moses, Jesus, Buddha and St. Francis of Assisi as “true geniuses in the art of living.” For Einstein, real wisdom wasn’t found in knowledge as much as was found in how you articulated that knowledge in the art of living. He proposed that the qualities of spiritual genius were more necessary to the future of the human dignity, security and joy than any objective knowledge.

That opens the door to faith, because that is where our wisdom is found. Einstein said, “My work has shown me that spiritual geniuses of the everyday are everywhere. They are the true masters of the world in which we have been given.”

“The discourse - the common good,” he said, “often drives us into despair.” In this, I think Einstein was right because, in this 24/7 news cycle where we internalize this deluge of bad news all of the time, it is hard to see the world of abundant beauty, courage and grace. It takes wisdom to dig through all of the bad news to find joy and hope – to find a way to create transformative resilient new realities that provide us with hope and life.

So wisdom is more than just pure knowledge. Einstein was amazing at knowing a whole lot about a whole lot of things and, yet, he said, “I have not wisdom, because I didn’t have, throughout a lot of my life, knowledge and wisdom about the art of living.” So when knowledge is at its best, it is learning or understanding information - and knowledge when it is at its worst, it is mere trivia or used to tear the world apart.

I have known brilliant people in my life, as I'm sure you all have, people who have a great deal more learning than I do; people who possess an amazing understanding of the world in which we live. But a lot of those people don't have wisdom, because wisdom is only truly found in faith. Wisdom is at work in the art of living. Wisdom, used through the God of all three forms of the trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is the way in which we learn the art of living. Apart from God we live lives that are trivial - of a need of something greater.

The wisdom that we need used to be found in Church, possibly in books, or in the example of family members who shared the faith with us; but today the Church is irrelevant, books are forgotten and families are often dissolved. Wisdom is needed more in our time than probably any other point in our history. Knowing who you are, but also "whose" you are, has never been more important.

Maybe the way to get at wisdom is to maybe figure out, first, what wisdom is not. The first lie is that the more you have is the more you are worth. That couldn't be farther from the truth of the Gospel message. Just because you have a lot of things or money doesn't mean that you are more worthy than someone else. In fact, read the Gospel of Luke especially. The writer says over and over that Jesus emphasizes the poor and the needy, at the expense of those who had so much. Your worth is based on something more. And yet in our society we want to degrade those who don't have enough, and lift up to great heights those who have far too much.

The second lie is: You've earned what you have. Malarkey. Most of us receive the blessings that we have, not because we have earned it, but because we were fortunate enough to be placed in positions that allowed us to get ahead of other people. You were born into a home that loved you instead of abused you. You were raised in a place where you had opportunities to take advantage of things that other people in other places did not. Now you certainly earned a portion of what you received, but a great deal of it is based on circumstances that were placed in front of you - that other people were not fortunate enough to have, like you have had.

Lie number 3: What matters most is taking care of number 1 - you. Again God says over and over in both the Old and New Testament that the wise people are those who put others before themselves, and that they will feel a richness and a joy that the selfish will never understand. When one lives without wisdom, our interests narrow, our sympathies weather, our imaginations are deadened, so that the only people we trust are ourselves. So we lose wisdom because we are only capable of being as wise as we already are. We won't let anyone else in and our wisdom can never be expanded.

Dr. Lauren Artress, who wrote a wonderful book called Walking the Sacred Path - it's actually about walking the labyrinth - but she said some of the most beautiful things in her book. One of those is: To live a life of regret is painful and difficult. If you do not live with wisdom - in other words if you do not live with God in your heart and in your mind - you will ultimately live a life of regret. Is there a greater reason to evangelize the Gospel of Jesus Christ beyond these walls then to help people get beyond their pain and regret?

Too often Presbyterians do not want to talk about evangelism. It is a bad word because we have heard it used so much to save people from damnation. But, we have a responsibility to evangelize, not to save their immortal souls - that is not our job, that's God's, and God is a grace-filled, loving God - but our task is, through the Holy Spirit, share the wisdom we possess - not of our own accord - but through God and Jesus Christ, blest by the Holy Spirit, to share with people how they can move beyond their pain and despair to hope and joy. And we need to stop being shy about it, because every moment we are shy and unwilling to take a risk, people suffer one day longer.

Artress continues: Here lays the great gift of the Spirit. Though we may have lost our way, when we come to that realization, we discover the path once again. God *wants* you to feel that joy, and God

will forgive and heal you at every step along the way, God isn't waiting to throw you into hell at any given moment. Wisdom tells us that God has our very best interests at heart. He wants to take away our pain and our despair. It is our task to be the hands and the feet, voice and wisdom of God in the midst of other people.

Wisdom is found in knowing that we need God to live meaningful, whole, wide lives and to share it. Wisdom doesn't mean a darn thing if we are not out there sharing it with our family, with our friends, and in those moments when God places someone in front of us. Wisdom is being prepared to share your faith with someone else. You can be wise and still be humiliated, because not everyone is going to want to hear your message. Just because some ignorant person does not want to hear, does not diminish the wisdom you possess. Try and try again. Wisdom affirms one's self-identity - body, mind and spirit. It fills us up and does not tear us down. Wisdom humbly cares for other people. Wisdom brings us into a close relationship with God. It brings us joy instead of despair, meaning instead of emptiness, and trust instead of fear. When I have been most fearful I have the least amount of wisdom in my heart and mind in that moment. When wisdom comes back through prayer, through reading, and through amazingly wise people that have come to my aid throughout my life, that fear goes away and I can trust God anew.

Think about those people in your life who took away your fear in that moment and gave you wisdom. Who were those people who shared faith with you and made you more hopeful and less desperate - more trusting - and allowed the spirit to flow in your once-hardened heart once again? You can be that for someone else if you have the courage and the wisdom to act.

I remember Billy Graham one time charged tens of thousands of people in a huge stadium. You could have heard a pin drop, when he pointed his finger at seemingly all of them all at the same time and he said, "Every single morning you wake up with 86,400 seconds to spend and invest each day. Each day you have a bank named 'time' which opens a new account each day. The trick is, it allows no balances and no overdrafts. If we fail to use the day's deposits the loss is ours. Each day that you have on this earth, you have 86,400 seconds to be wise, to be caring, and to be responsible, faithful, fearless and joyous for others. Are you going to let those valuable seconds fall away or will you use them to the Glory of God and have a rich full and abundant life?"

Let us pray that you will, so that you can feel and experience the joy of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through wisdom that speaks to us now and always. Amen