

Sunday 7th February 2021

If you were to call to mind one person who is wise, I wonder who you'd think of? Maybe a teacher or an older member of the family, maybe a judge, or an engineer. Being wise, having wisdom, is a tough goal, for it's not something we were born with, or learnt by rote at school.

King Solomon, on learning that he was inheriting the kingdom from his father, King David, could have asked anything of God - gold, riches, power, lands... but Solomon asked for the gift of wisdom, and received it. He wanted to rule wisely, to know how to balance all the needs of the kingdom, and still draw close to God. I wonder how many of us have also longed for the same gift, of being wise and able to make right choices, of knowing how to discern the good path, the wisdom of keeping silence and knowing when to speak...?

Many of us will have learn our wisdom (and yes, we are all wise in different ways) - from proverbs that have been handed down. A stitch in time saves nine, red sky at night, shepherd's delight, make hay while the sun shines... you'll have your own favourites that help you live life well. They are true, and they keep us true. These proverbs go back for thousands of years, and one of the best collections is in our very own Bible.

But reading the book of Proverbs won't make you wise. The Biblical book is about religious and family life in Bronze age society - sometimes hard to apply today. Not only that, but the proverbs often contradict each other - reminding us that wisdom is a slippery thing, elusive, hard to pin down when we find ourselves in new, unusual situation... Yet when we come across a proverb or even a meme that sums up a situation - there's a sense of satisfaction, that someone else has recognised what we too know to be true, we share in something timeless and special that words can only begin to convey.

So we come to our first reading - apparently written by Solomon himself, as a testament to the gift God had given him. Note that wisdom here is described as a female character in the story, the overlap in the way we'd describe the Holy Spirit as a co-creator, sharing the formation of the world. There's something hopeful in that beautiful poem - how God builds wisdom, common sense, and discernment into the world, from even before the world began. There are paths of righteousness we can follow, and ways of wisdom as we seek after what God longs for us, and it is that same wisdom that helps us see and rejoice in what God is at work in the world.

By the time we come to the letter to the Colossians, written several hundred years later, it is Jesus who is co-creating the world with the Father; the Son who is also the dwelling place for God's wisdom and power. Whenever we share worship together, we hear Jesus' words of wisdom, and try to follow in his way of life. The Beginning of John's Gospel is a strange and mysterious text, full of concentrated wisdom - a creation story like that of Genesis, but one which seeks to show us that light and love, and hope were built into the world from the very beginning, and made human, made one-with-us in the person of Jesus.

When we speak of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, these passages give us a glimpse into what that dynamic must look like, three persons, constantly encouraging each other and pouring out their love for the world. It is the Spirit, or Wisdom, which binds the Trinity together, and the same is true of our human relationships with each other and with God - knowing when to speak and when to keep silence, as the writer of Ecclesiastes puts it.

So what does that mean for us today? After the year we've had, after all the hard decisions and plans and judgements that have been needed in the face of chaos and disruption, the need for wisdom, and our reliance on God's wisdom, have not gone away. In the times when we've been able to take a step back, to rejoice in some of the good we have noticed despite the overwhelming darkness, God's wisdom has been there. When we have struggled to keep communities together, wisdom has helped us reach out in love and encouragement. In the times when we feel lost for words at the grief and suffering God's wisdom is with us as we pray and listen.

All four of our readings today show us that wisdom is an elusive, mysterious gift from God, but that God's wisdom has been a gift to each and every one of us from the beginning of time. As we look to a year of new beginnings and rebuilding communities and livelihoods; knowing when to listen and what to say, knowing

how to chose the path that is closest to Christ, and closest to God's purposes, will be the wisdom that guides and encourages us.Amen.