

## Wisdom

A sermon prepared for the Tenth Sunday of Trinity 15 August 2021

Refs: 1 Kings 2.10-12, 3.3-14; Ephesians 5.15-20; John 6.51-58

Our readings today are about wisdom. They tell us something about the difference between wisdom and foolishness, being wise and being unwise.

I suppose in today's world we would question the wisdom of beginning a passage with '*David slept with his ancestors...*' How wise of our reader to move swiftly on to '*and was buried in the city of David...*' So already one piece of wisdom – never take words at their face value. It's always important to check what they meant when they were written! We can think of many words that have changed their meaning in quite a short space of time. And our passage from *Kings* has other examples of this. In fact, the whole passage is a little bit of a puzzle – there are so many inconsistencies.

The writer of *Kings* tells us that Solomon was a wise King. But if we look a bit deeper, we discover that this 'wisdom' had a very limited meaning. First, we should note that Solomon's Kingdom was not firmly established until he had murdered a number of people in his court whom he considered to be rivals. Then we have that statement that Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David. But, a very important 'but', we hear that he didn't actually obey the Mosaic Law about offering sacrifices! And then there is his private life. This was anything but righteous according to the Law. He had a number of wives of other nations that the Law forbade intermarriage with! And then there were those concubines. *Kings* tells us that he had 700 wives in all, and 300 concubines! No wonder that later in his life his wives 'turned his heart' so that he turned away from God completely.

So, in this context, wisdom was limited. It was only to do with the way in which he ran the country ... he was, it seems, a wise ruler and judge, but not particularly 'righteous'. Because righteousness at that time, was a question of obeying the Mosaic laws and commandments. Solomon seems to have failed many times in this – so it's quite a puzzle as to why the writer of this book of *Kings* chose to call him '*righteous*' in places, even though he also describes some of the awful things Solomon did.

As I've just said, for the Jews, 'righteousness', 'salvation' did involve obeying that Mosaic Law, but for many of them this was a purely outward affair. As long as they could tick off that practical list, it didn't matter too much what was going on in their heart. And as time went on, the scribes and pharisees kept adding bits and pieces to the Law and found out ways of using them to their own advantage. This often resulted in the poor, the sick, the widowed being made outcasts, it was anything but a demonstration of '*Loving one's neighbour*'. And this, of course, was what Jesus challenged so aggressively. And to those around him, that 'challenging' didn't seem at all wise .... it seemed utter foolishness.. and Jesus seemed determined to stick to this foolish way – even though it led him to the Cross. Perhaps, to many, the most foolish action of all.

But challenging those in authority wasn't Jesus' only foolishness. Much of what he said seemed to go against all common sense – all idea of wisdom. How could he possibly be a son of God? How could he be the Bread of Life? How on earth could they eat his flesh? All total nonsense, surely. And even his disciples must have felt very confused at first. It wouldn't have been until that first last Supper that they might have just had some inkling of what Jesus meant... that Bread might become Flesh .. and this Flesh would be the Bread that gave eternal life!

And of course, this is still a puzzle to us today. But I don't think anyone would be here in church today if we hadn't thought about this, and about that greatest puzzle of all – that Jesus died but rose again and ascended into heaven. You may not be totally certain in your mind that this could have happened, and that's fine. You don't have to leave church – we shan't be looking to see if anyone doesn't join in all the words of the creed. But there must be something in your heart or your soul or your mind that stops you from dismissing it as pure rubbish otherwise you probably wouldn't be here. And, of course, here is a clue to something about wisdom.

Wisdom is not just about facts, knowledge. Something else is at play – the things we feel/experience somewhere inside us – in our hearts and souls. We live in a society that has become very dependent on scientific evidence before we believe anything. If it can't be proved or explained scientifically, then it can't be true or valid. But we all know – whether we have a faith or not – that this just isn't true! We know this in that heart and soul of ourselves. Even the most sceptical of people have to acknowledge that science and logic don't explain everything – they often seem to have very little to do with falling in love. People are drawn into relationships that are totally unwise/foolish logically. And yet the pull is so strong it seems foolish to disobey it.

And I believe that those most sceptical of people do experience things that are not just physical – but are spiritual, of the numinous. They may not attribute them to some divine power, but I don't believe anyone is without such experiences ...I pray this is the case ... imagine never experiencing that extraordinary feeling as we watch a sunrise or sunset or meet up with the person we love.

So, I believe that wisdom can't be totally defined scientifically, objectively. Those inexplicable 'feelings' we have are just as real as any scientific evidence ...and for many people, the experiences they have of something of the divine/numinous are far more real than those Higgs Bosons that physicists tell us exist (and I say this as a scientist – most of you know that I read physics at university). It's very tempting to try to find answers to the many mysteries that faith presents us with. But for most people, that faith is first something of the heart, of the soul, only then backed up by possible facts or logic.

For many people, the mystery of the eucharist is just that – a mystery. The wafer of bread does not become human flesh, but somehow it becomes the Body of Christ, somehow it become the bread that gives us eternal life. And when we feed on this bread, by faith with thanksgiving, and when we feed on the words of scripture, on the experiences we have in prayer, in God's creation, in the people around us, it is the Holy Spirit feeding us. It feeds us with the strength we need to go out and make other mysteries of faith real. We make what is foolish in the world's eyes, but wisdom in God's eyes real. We make Christ's presence with us now, God's kingdom here and now - real in our life and to the world around us by our actions, by our words, by our caring, by our love.

Amen.