

Living As Wise People

Although the text from the Hebrew Scriptures from 1st Kings was not read this morning, it is a familiar part of the history of the Israelite nation. The long reign of David has come to an end with a fight among his sons for the throne. Solomon has emerged the victor, although the selected passage omits all the political maneuverings which bring about this younger son's ascension, he is now firmly established as the new king. What this particular passage tells us that Solomon loved the Lord and has gone to make offerings at Gibeon, a high place where the Canaanites once worshiped. While there, he has a dream in which God says to him: "Ask what I should give you." Even though we did not read this passage...do you see the connection to the other texts and our lives? As I read in a commentary on this passage...the question was asked "what would you wish for if you could wish for anything"? Would it be what Solomon asked for? He asks for the ability to discern good from evil? In Psalm 111: 10 the psalmist says that "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding." The Hebrew word translated within the psalm as fear is also translated as awe in other places, and is only used in connection with the feeling felt when in God's presence. Even though these two pieces of scripture were not read this morning, they provide a foundation for us to understand the message the writer to the believers in Ephesus was trying to convey about the care they needed to take about how they lived. "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people, but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." When the church was first forming there was a sense of urgency which we do not possess living as we do over two thousand years after Christ. The wisdom which is expressed in Ephesians reflects an understanding of Christian life as being lived in the "in-between time," the time between Christ's inauguration of the reign of God by proclaiming it near, revealing God's love for all and demonstrating how all were to be included until its completion on the last day. The language of Ephesians reflects this understanding of Christians as those who have been "marked with a seal for the day of redemption". There is actually no sense of urgency about the possible shortness of the "in-between time", but there is definitely a warning that being "marked with that seal" locates one's life in that particular time in a particular way: it shapes the behavior of those who are Christian and is part of what it means to be "wise." To be wise is to understand the will of the Lord, to be filled with the Spirit, and give thanks to God at all times for everything in the

name of Jesus Christ. Like much of the instructions for us found within scriptures most seem to have a three-fold nature. The last one listed about giving thanks is one we do often...ritually at least. We have institutionalized and ritualized praise and thanks into the structure of our worship services. The other aspects of wisdom are harder for us, especially as we seem to have trouble discerning some aspects of God's will. The scriptures help Christians understand part of that will in its broadest sense. We understand that God summons us to a faithful acceptance of God's grace. We understand that God calls us to wait in hopeful expectation of Jesus Christ's return at the end of measured time. What's more we understand that God invites God's adopted children to love God above all and our neighbors as much as ourselves. But, understanding how this, especially this last part is to be applied in our daily lives can be more difficult. Whom should I befriend? How should I use my time, money and other resources? Sometimes it is helpful to look at the words used in the original document, for when the writer chooses to warn the congregation in the opening verse the word he uses also translates as "be careful then how you walk." In other words, we might say, "Watch you step." This is important because it helps us to realize that our way of life is actually made up of many small choices...individual steps. If we only want to look at the big picture...we might not notice the mis-steps which lead us away from God's vision and will. Understanding that second part of the psalm's verse about practicing awe about God's presence with us as the source of wisdom for making those wise choices to help us remain faithful disciples connects the Epistle's text to the ancient verse's understanding of God's guidance. We live in an amazing era. We are surrounded by more information than at any other time in human history. There is virtually no fact or information that you cannot look up, yet we seem unable to translate all that information into a form that will give our lives meaning—we seem even unable to even discern what information is trustworthy or reliable. There is a vast difference between information and wisdom. Information is as accessible as a reliable source. Wisdom, on the other hand is very different. Wisdom is like learning a skill, it doesn't just happen. It must be learned and developed over time and repeated practice. In order to live as wise people, we must seek out God's will and practice being faithful disciples. In our gospel accounts of Jesus' life we have the example of one who lived his whole life in reverence to God. Jesus summarized this lifestyle in different words that are familiar to us all: "you shall love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all you soul and with all your mind, and with all your

strength” and “you shall love your neighbor as yourself”. If we put these two things into practice it would seem that would be following the way of one who came to redeem us. In the last portion of John’s gospel which we read this morning verse 51 summarizes what Jesus has been saying since verse 32: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.” The reference Jesus makes to the death that threatened Israel under the Exodus desert conditions, also referenced the separation from God represented by the sentiment expressed by these fleeing former slaves that life in Egypt was preferable. Manna was the solution God provided in the desert; Jesus has been interpreting the scripture to identify himself as manna, as the bringer of life for those who trust in him. Manna is already a story about God’s life-giving power. Jesus uses this opportunity to clarify that the life he brings as manna is this kind of life: it extends forever. Jesus also makes the point that this “life” is not limited to a future heavenly experience after death, the tense is present. Those who trust in Jesus and “have eternal life” participate in this “life” even now, they abide in him as he abides in them, as the gospel of John phrases it. Christ offers a union that endures, a presence on the walk through this life, always there for those wise ones who seek him. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.