

September 13, 2009

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Readings: Proverbs 1:20-33  
Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 - 8:1  
James 3:1-12  
Mark 8:27-38

### **“Speaking Words of Wisdom”**

If you are new to Scarboro or just returned and weren't here over the past four weeks, I have been preaching on Wisdom, generally at first, and then getting more specific. We took a look at Solomon, who in his wisdom, decided to build the great Temple in Jerusalem. Was he putting God in a box? Is God essentially homeless and longing to be in right relation with us?

Two weeks ago we took a look at wisdom from deep passion. By exploring part of the Song of Songs, the only erotic love poem in the Bible, we saw how wisdom arises when we love deeply - not just lovers but all creation and God the Creator.

Last week we took a look at wisdom from friends in low places, how Jesus learned from an outcast foreign woman that God's healing is for all people - not just the rich and powerful. From the letter of James we were urged to treat rich and poor alike.

This week we have wisdom in the streets, on the corner, in the market and at the city gates, very frustrated by our refusal to listen.

Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do you say I am?" and is very frustrated with the response he gets from Peter who wants to be saved from suffering..

James, whom we haven't heard from yet, gives some faith-based words of wisdom to help us live in community.

From Proverbs and the Wisdom Hymn we sang, we learn that wisdom is not an object to possess. Wisdom comes to us when we are open to it, part of God's grace. Fear, loathing and panic close us off from wisdom making it impossible for us to hear. Wisdom is not about our personal safety and security. Wisdom on the road, in the street, wherever there is suffering, just as the Kingdom of God Jesus spoke of, is found in the wilderness where John calls us to prepare the way, in the stable of Jesus' birth and on the cross of his death.

The image of wisdom being in the streets indicates that wisdom is about a journey, not a destination. Wisdom comes when we decide to go somewhere or to do something - whether it is to the cross or just into the streets. When we decide to stay put we are often just playing it safe. Being on a faith journey means that we are sojourners on a road trip where, as we travel together, we become less guarded and we begin to share our stories of where we are going and why, our faith and who Jesus

is to us.

For when Jesus asks his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” he also asks us the same question. It is a question with two parts. When we say who Jesus is for us it affects everything we do from here on. It also implies that when we say who Jesus is for us that we actually say that to others. Are you saying, with your words and your life, who Jesus is to you? Each of our lives preaches a message about our beliefs. A saying attributed to St. Francis urging us to “preach the Gospel and, if necessary, use words.” Sometimes the words are necessary. We have to be ready to speak our truth when the opportunity comes.

In the recent edition of “The Observer” there is an article on the “Festival of Homiletics.” That’s just a church way of saying “Preaching Conference” and making it sound interesting. The article is about new directions in preaching and concludes that it is essential that preachers combine evangelism, social justice and social action.

Curiously over 50 years ago the United Church had a Department of Evangelism and Social Service – social service being another name for justice and outreach. I think sometimes we don’t realize that our church has been 50 years ahead of our time. So when your friends say we are not relevant you can say “you just haven’t caught up yet.” Before we get smug, we need to ask how far ahead was Jesus? If we apply ourselves we might just catch up!

As we journey together this year, we are not alone. We have some important things to do. I can’t mention everything but here is a brief sample of where we are headed, the places we are going on our journey:

- Outreach is implementing a monthly focus.
- Pastoral Care is arranging a workshop on pre-need funeral arrangements.
- A study called “First Light: Jesus and the Kingdom of God” with Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan will be starting in October.
- Building in Faith is a campaign leading to the redevelopment of the north annex
- Stewardship education and Club 50 will be helping us support our ministry as a congregation
- We now have Jan Craig, our new Retired Supply, who will see us through to the new year and set the stage for a more permanent minister.
- We will continue to explore right relations with First Nations people. Skyblue Morin led us in worship on the Aboriginal Day of Prayer and I would like to see us have at least one more event this year in addition to that day.

- Affirm United is being very intentional about our desire to learn, to grow to break down the barriers that exclude some from this journey. The YouthSafe workshop is happening next Sunday and the annual Affirm Conference takes place the end of October.
- In Worship, hold on to your seats and get your hard hats on! We have so much in the works we are having to develop an on-line calendar to keep track of it all, and keep track of each other. For example, Partners in Preaching will give you a chance to participate in sermon and worship preparation and review the results. It may even give you an opportunity to preach. I have also started a "blog" on the net called "Another Sunday Coming" which invites you to read, comment and help me be ready for an upcoming Sunday.
- And so many of your favourite events are happening starting today with Sunday Sundaes downstairs in the gym. Sunday School has begun today. Watch for the Fall Fair, Turkey Burgers, Fruits of the Spirit and more!
- The newly- formed Fellowship Committee will help us with many of the events. We are looking for more ways we can do the sharing part, where we sit around the campfire at the end of the day and across the dying flames and glowing embers, I tell you about my God, my hopes and my dreams and you tell me about yours, being open with wisdom emerging amongst us.

All this is about the journey, our journey together. It isn't about being busy. It isn't about being fast. It isn't about you and it isn't about me. It's about us, working toward right relationships with each other, with God, with creation, with the journey. It's about the one who walks with us. It's about the wisdom that emerges as we engage the suffering of the world together and with hope, sharing in holy conversations. To this end we will need the wisdom of the tongue that James speaks to (James 3:4 ff):

"Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. . . For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh."

To encourage a right relation to each other as we live out who Jesus is for us, it is essential that we attend to the way Christians engage conflict and talk to each other in holy conversations. The recent General Council meeting in Kelowna developed a covenant towards that end:

### A Whole People's Covenant

Each of us comes as a pilgrim to this gathering of brothers and sisters in Christ. Each of us comes with our own cultural values, assumptions and world views. Each one of us and the cultures we represent, are God's living letters of faith, hope, love and beauty. Therefore, we embrace the following Christian virtues that honour God and promote right relationship between us as we gather together and learn from one another:

We promise to relate to one another with:

- ✍ Respect
- ✍ And the spirit of grace and forgiveness we have received in Christ Jesus.

We acknowledge the land that we stand upon by:

- ✍ Remembering our aboriginal sisters and brothers who have walked these paths before us
- ✍ Understanding that we are one part of God's creation
- ✍ Honouring our future generations by preserving this land as they find their own paths.

In our Christian love for one another we will:

- ✍ Invite the spirit into both our worship and business
- ✍ Listen to others with our whole selves: our physical senses, intuition, imagination, and intellect
- ✍ Speak for ourselves in the spirit of truth and gentleness, avoiding unhelpful generalizations and racial stereotypes
- ✍ Not interrupt when others are speaking
- ✍ Be mindful of language that is not inclusive
- ✍ Affirm the deep wisdom of silence and pause, as necessary, to ponder what others have said
- ✍ Seek to understand rather than win arguments and assume best intentions
- ✍ Hold our beliefs and opinions lightly
- ✍ Hold one another in prayer.

Today this pilgrimage will lead us to becoming a Whole People. With God's help I will leave behind what I must to make this journey. Thanks be to God.

Amen