

In the cartoon the climber struggles up the mountain to ask the seated guru an urgent question like “What is the meaning of life?” The guru replies with a quip like “It’s my day off. Come back tomorrow.” Secular society reveres the guru as wise because he has much intellectual knowledge, facts he’s learned from books or life’s lessons. On the other hand, Christians define wisdom differently because Jesus turned this idea on its head. He taught that wisdom comes from the heart, not the head. To be loving is the path to pursuing wisdom. To be loving is to be compassionate to the poor and to forgive our enemies. Since we mess up every day Christians are grateful for God’s continuing love, compassion, and forgiveness toward us.

Gaining wisdom is so much easier said than done. While there are moral tenets that all religions believe like Do unto others...Love your neighbor as yourself...and Respect another’s dignity, most of life is lived in the gray areas of uncertainty. General principles are fine but mostly we need wisdom to navigate specific situations. The bible teaches that wise Christians are connected to God, the source of Love. God sent Jesus to teach us what God’s love looks like in action. He exemplifies the way of Love, the way to wisdom. Which coincidentally is one of Bishop Curry’s main initiatives. We’ve been introduced to the Bishop’s practices for a Jesus-centered life: Learn from scripture; Pray; Worship in community; Share & give; Go out and serve. Love in action...paths to wisdom. The Wise prayerfully submit to God’s guidance and experience connecting with God that results in joy and gratitude. They see connections to Christ in all the people and nature that surrounds them. And...they want to share that connectedness to God with others.

In our instant gratification culture it would be nice to wake up one morning having had a dream where we were anointed with wisdom. Wha-la! Like Solomon. But our wise God knew we probably couldn’t handle that so, becoming wise is a process. Often we only understand this process in hindsight as we look back to see how circumstances and experiences meshed for good. Today’s readings give hints about growing in wisdom.

Joseph in today’s OT lesson is an example in becoming wise. At 17 and as the favored son he was arrogant, bragging about his dream interpretations; tattling on his brothers to his father—a bit of a know-it-all. By the time he’s in his 40s and reunited with his brothers he can look back at events in his life —thrown in the pit, becoming a slave, falsely accused of rape & imprisoned, interpreting dreams to eventually run the Pharaoh’s gov’t—he humbly reflects how God turned his hardships into opportunities. He says to his brothers — “God sent me on ahead to pave the way and make sure there was a remnant in the land, to save your lives in an amazing act of deliverance. So you see, it wasn’t you who sent me here but God.” He’s grateful and forgives his brothers for faking his death decades before. He craves reconciliation not revenge. He doesn’t want them to feel guilty, but to feel joy and gratitude also. God was with Joseph and he wants to pay it forward with loving forgiveness. By learning from his experiences Joseph grew in wisdom.

As we see there is no shortcut in life to becoming a wise person. We gain wisdom one step at a time, one confusing situation at a time. And as Paul says in the beginning of his letter to the Corinthians, "Jesus became wisdom for us from God." Jesus's ministry is essentially a series of wisdom lessons. Luke condenses several of Jesus's teachings into the setting of the Sermon on the Plain. This is similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel. Many of the same sayings which underscores their importance. Jesus is the ultimate example of how we can live a loving, compassionate, merciful life—a wise life. Besides the blessings & woes that Fr. Nick preached last week Jesus makes several more strong suggestions this week.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you."

On Oct. 2, 2006 a man named Charles Carl Roberts IV entered a one-room schoolhouse in the heart of the Amish settlement southeast of the city of Lancaster, and shot 10 children, killing five, before ending his own life with a gunshot.

The Amish forgave the man who killed five of their children. They embraced the man's widow and forgave her. They responded not with anger or hatred but with love.

"We have to forgive," said one farmer. "Jesus forgave us our sins. How can we expect forgiveness if we can't give it?" Another man explained "Jesus set the example, forgiving those who ordered and carried out his execution on Calvary. The only thing we can do is forgive and move on and have faith that God has a plan."

Jesus says "Be merciful, do not judge or condemn, forgive."

Another of Jesus's wisdom lessons we hear today: "Give to those who would rob you, give to all who beg."

There is a story told about John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria in early 7th c., who was known for his compassion for the poor. A man noticing John's remarkable sympathy toward refugees from Syria decided to test the Patriarch. He put on old clothes and approached him as he going to visit the sick in the hospitals and said to him: "Have mercy upon me for I am a prisoner of war." John said to his purse-bearer: "Give him six coins." The man left, changed his clothes, met John again on another street, and falling at his feet said: "Have pity upon me for I am in want." The Patriarch again said to his purse-bearer: "Give him six coins." As he went away the purse-bearer whispered in the patriarch's ear: "Master, this same man has had money from you twice now!" But the Patriarch pretended not to understand. Soon the man came again for the third time to ask for money and the attendant, carrying the gold, nudged the Patriarch to let him know that it was the same man; whereupon John said: "Give him twelve coins, for perhaps it is my Christ and He is testing me."

As Bishop Curry reminds us a way of love is to give and serve unselfishly.

Today we heard Paul write to the Corinthians about seeds. God has planted a divine seed deep in each of us. As we practice sharing the ways of love that Jesus taught who know what wonders will sprout. We are drawn to nurture our tiny seeds to reflect God's image in our lives. We grow to reflect God's Love. We learn how to discern the Way of Love in the gray areas of life. And so, we are becoming wise.

