

Sermon: August 16, 2009 – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev'd Canon Joye Q. Cantrell

John 6:51-58

Last Sunday if you were unable to get to Trinity you missed a very fine sermon by Canon Riegel. As Bob pointed up to us in the sermon last week, there are 5, yes 5 weeks in a row during Ordinary Time when our gospel lessons come from the Gospel of John and deal with Bread.

Bread is one of the most significant symbols in the fourth gospel and the sacrament of the Eucharist is critical to us as Episcopalian Christians. But since Canon Riegel did such a good job and since he gets a chance next Sunday to follow up on what he said last Sunday he has left me free to talk about something that I find fascinating.

Wisdom.

What is real wisdom ?

About two weeks ago I had the wonderful pleasure of getting a call from my married son who lives in Miami. At work they were being given three unpaid furlough days since things are slow in Florida in the fancy restaurant business and he said “Mom, you said that you were really missing me. Would you swing for a plane ticket and I could come and spend 2 days with you.”

Well, what Mom would say no to that offer?

So he came and we had a delightful time together. He wouldn't get up and to with me to the 7:30 am Eucharist but he was sport enough to come to the soup kitchen and set new efficiency records in cutting pastries and serving salads. He has always been a fun, caring and loving person and I thoroughly enjoyed by two days with him.

But there were some years in high school and college when I despaired that all of his good education had been a waste since he could not seem to understand consequential behavior unless it was part of a video game. He could not seem to grasp the fact that if one spent one's monthly allowance in the first 2 weeks of the month that the last two weeks would be lean and mean. And he spent a year at Clemson during which time he clearly had a glorious time but did not attend classes nor did he study. He was as we parents like to say “making some very bad choices.”

The result was that the university and his mother were both very displeased. His sister Margaret was horrified. And although the university was more than willing to give him another chance his mother was not and he found himself living in Clinton, working and attending PC so that he could stay on my health insurance. Thank goodness those years are behind us and not only are my son is fun, loving and caring person he is a person who makes better decisions and seems to understand consequences.

Sometime during these rough years I saw a quote that I immediately wrote in my low tech reference book-- that brought me comfort and hopefully taught Paul something as I said it to him often enough.

***Good Judgment is usually the result of experience.
And experience is frequently the result of bad judgment.***

So if we can simply look back on our bad decisions will we be wise?

In life there are always temptations that can cause us to make bad judgments. The list of sins and the opportunities to sin seem endless.

Even if we learn from our past experiences it seems that sin will just manifest in a new way. Old sins in new packages.... So clearly just looking back will not make us wise.

If we could but legislate a world with less opportunity for sin would we be able to simply wipe out the opportunities and find wisdom in a more perfect world?

Some of you may remember the words of song by the Eagles that had something to say about that.

On a desert highway, cool wind in my hair
Warm smell of colitis rising up through the air
Up ahead in the distance,
I saw a shimmering light
My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim
I had to stop for the nigh.

There she stood in the Doorway
I head the mission bell
And I was thinking to myself,
This could be heaven or this could be Hell
Then she lit up a candle and she showed me the way
There were voices down the corridor
I thought I heard them say...

Welcome to the Hotel California
Such a lovely place, such a lovely face
Plenty of room at the Hotel California
Any time of year, you can find it here.

Last thing I remember, I was running for the door
I had to find the passage back
To the place I was before
Relax, said the night man
You are programmed to receive
You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave.

So if sin abounds and always will can we live wisely? Can we know wisdom?

In Hebrew Scripture alone the word wisdom occurs 318 times. ½ of those occur in Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes—they teach us about living well in accordance with God’s will. Yes, we will live better lives and happier lives if we follow God’s commandments to us because there will always be temptations or as the song says we are programmed to sin.

But, But my fiends. Wisdom, wisdom is much more than just making good decisions or choosing the right places to be although both of these can make us safer.

In Ephesians this morning scripture tell us to be careful how we live--- making the most of the time because there is always evil around.

The book of Ephesians outlines in a grand and organized fashion what it means to live out the Christian Life.

What are the ethics, the value, the rhythms that make Christian living distinctive? Our five verses for this morning summarize all that Paul has said before. They begin, very simply, with these words “Be careful then how you live.”

If we take the Christian faith seriously we need to remember what happens in baptism. God gathers us to a love that precedes all other human relationships and family ties. Baptism signifies that we belong to God. Wisdom lies in how we respond to God’s grace. The Christian faith is a way more than it is a law. It is a lens giving vision, rather than a fortress providing security. It is a mantle of identity, rather than a manual. Our Christian faith, this Jesus way of life is rooted in relationship and not a rule. In addressing the fast paced multicultural materialistic world of first century Ephesus Paul makes it clear that Christian living must be distinctively in the world but not of the world. This relationship with a living God must be given a time and a place of its own so that the weeds and tangles of secular living don’t strangle and destroy the Spirit. And the most distinctive behavior of us as Christians is our worship. When we take time and find the place to admit with others what is ultimately worth knowing.

Having Wisdom then is understanding the will of the Lord.

Understanding the will of the Lord.

God wills that we be filled with the Holy Spirit and that in our hearts and in our lives we will---

Give thanks to God the father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Being wise is living and understanding who we are in relation to God and in relation to our neighbors. Jesus came to redeem us from our foolishness. Each and every time we say the confession we are given the chance to go back to the place we were before---in harmony and peace with God.

Hear the words of the confession that we will say later in this service.

Most merciful God,

We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ have mercy on us and forgive us;

Lord

SO THAT,

SO That Triune God we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways to the glory of your name.

When we say the confession we are acknowledging that no matter how hard we try or how much we reflect on our past behavior we will always do things that we shouldn't and we will always leave things undone which we should have done. We know that we always fall short on loving God and our neighbors even when we try our best.

And in worship we say these things together. Reminding us that all of us sin; all of us fall short.

And after that confession the Bishop or Priest speaking for God gives each of us forgiveness of our sins because Jesus died for us. Your sins are forgiven, my sins are forgiven. Wiped clean not by our goodness but by Christ's love for us.

And having acknowledged how we fall short and having received God's forgiveness we ask God to send the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and to help us live wisely.

There is wisdom in knowing God's forgiveness and finding the peace that comes with it. Wisdom in knowing who we belong to.

God calls us to live lives of thanksgiving in all things and in all places.

Or put another way:

To love with the heart of Christ,

to think with the mind of Christ

to act in the world as the body of Christ.

If we have wisdom: Our attitudes, our schedules, our checkbooks will reflect it. In every aspect of our lives we will reflect our relationship with the living God, how we see ourselves and how we interact with our neighbors.

My prayer is that each of us may live as individuals and as a community where good choices are made because we have WISDOM.