

“Word/Wisdom

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A wise quote recently came to mind. I first encountered this gem 30-plus years ago – and at that time it began to resonate and challenge me. The source of this quote is the 19th century thinker – Ralph Waldo Emerson. Here we go...

“The Years teach much which the days never know”

For those of you old enough – let this sink in. For those of you younger – file it away for future consideration, but not too far away!

There are many things that can only be learned (if learned at all) through experience and time. I can recall, in my late teens and early 20's – being frustrated when applying for a position (this was prior to ministry), I would not be considered because I did not have the experience. I thought – “How can I get the experience, if no one hires me?” Keep in mind, I was young and inexperienced!

The passing years offer much to garner knowledge and wisdom – if one positions him/herself to learn. How we need Wisdom! We are the living – right now – it's our turn to act – using a great storehouse of knowledge and shared wisdom. (And one great storehouse is our Faith, history and our Bible.) This/these pursuits are not novel, they are not new, or unique to us – but they are instrumental in how we live our lives – gaining, acquiring knowledge and wisdom.

Young Mia, only four years old, returned home from Wicor Nursery School complaining, “Mummy, I've got a stomach ache.” “That's because your stomach is empty,” Sarah, her mother replied kindly. “You'll feel better when you have something in it.” She made Mia a small snack and sure enough, Mia felt better immediately.

Later that afternoon Mia's class tutor dropped by to see Sarah. While chatting with Mia's mum, she mentioned she'd had a bad headache all day long. Mia perked up straightaway and announced to her teacher, “that's because it's empty. You'd feel better if you had something in it!”

From the mouths of babes!

There is a need to fill our minds and hearts – with Wisdom.

Here are a few other snippets of wisdom:

The empty vessel makes the greatest sound – William Shakespeare

Silence and smile are two powerful words. Smile is the way to solve many problems and Silence is the way to avoid many problems – Anon

He has all the virtues I dislike, and none of the vices I admire – Winston Churchill

I used to be indecisive, now I'm not so sure – W.C. Fields

Mistakes are painful when they happen, but years later a collection of mistakes called Experience leads us to success

A wise man listens to advice – Proverbs 12:15

The reason this Emerson quote came to me, was the biblical text that was the Lectionary Reading two weeks ago when we visited with our neighbors at St. Stephen's Church. It was the Lukan passage used after Easter (very fitting). Two followers of Jesus are leaving town (Jerusalem) because their hope for Messiah is dead. Not only dead, but crucified like a common criminal! Hope was dashed! All was lost!

"Let's just go back to our old, empty, futile lives. Let's hit the road!" Jesus joins them on the road, they don't recognize him. He engages them in conversation – he knows the right words to share. He is knowledgeable of things!

They are enthralled – something is stirring in their hearts and minds! They persuade him to join them for dinner. Now here's the deep substance – "When he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him..."

Jesus – known in the breaking of the bread! Sound familiar? The Lord's Supper! And there is a corollary – This Jesus Christ – the bread of life – the sustenance of life – is the Word of life we Christians are to be nourished on. Here is where John's Gospel enters!

We gain our knowledge and wisdom – in how God wants us to live – through the Word of God that bread of life that nourishes us! "In the beginning was the word..." We need to know this "Word"! This "Word" defines us, or at least this "Word" should define us! This "Word" has an etymology; a fascinating etymology!

Ever so briefly, it begins among words – composed in the ancient history and story of Israel. These words found form and syntax within what came to be known as the Hebrew Scriptures; the Old Testament.

A people, a culture, a worldview developed.

Then we find ourselves, our words, in the first century A.D. This rich composition of words is further enriched by the Greek culture. We open the word document called The Gospel of John, and are amazed and inspired "In the beginning was the Word!"

The Word (Logos) in the early Christian centuries was defined in Greek; used philosophically as linking The Divine with humanity. Also, the Jews saw this link as between heaven and earth, termed – Logos, or Sophia (wisdom), or Aramaic "Memra" ("word"). This Bread of Life – is our "Word" our "Wisdom" – how to live and understand God's creation!

Note, in the "Logos" (Word) there is both Greek and Jewish usage, and understanding. I'll confess, in my early theological studies, the Greek concept was primary. In fact, apart from allusions to Hebrew "Wisdom" (personified), the Jewish conception was "unknown"?

But, more recent studies, and increased scholarship in the direct relationship between Judaism and Christianity, in both first century developments, has brought to light, greater affinity between them.

Jewish monotheism recognized other supernatural beings who communicated the will of God. Jewish scholar, Marc Brettler, declares, “The use of the ‘Logos’ in John’s Gospel (“In the Beginning was the Word/Logos, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [John 1:1] is thus a thoroughly Jewish usage” He goes on to conjecture that the development of the Trinity came about during the pre-Christian Jewish “...accounts of the second and visible God that we find in many early Jewish writings.” Fascinating; a Jewish intellectual of that period, used “logos” as commonplace; the idea that the manifestation of a “second God” (Logos) did not conflict with his concept of monotheism! This truly opens the field of early Christian and Jewish development and relationality!

The Greek translation (of the Old Testament) in existence then, the “Septuagint”, often uses the “Word of God” as it creates, reveals and redeems. Not all Jewish, Rabbinic scholars of antiquity agreed, but such has been the case for, all theological/philosophical pursuits. Also, interesting is the use of the word, “Memra” (recall, the Aramaic for “word”) is used in the Jewish Palestinian Targum (Translation – interpretation).

Via, Genesis 1:3 “And God said, let there be...” “The Word by which God brought the universe into being is the Memra (Word – Logos)” The opening of John’s Gospel is a midrash, a homily (a study) on Genesis 1:1-5, “In the beginning.”

Of course, the religions progress, and separate. Yet this “Word”, “Logos”, “Memra” began in Judaism, and moved into Christianity’s Christology of this “Logos” “Word became flesh”.

As Christians we dare declare that the way we see, understand and interpret life, is in and through this Word – Jesus Christ!

We dare declare that this “Word”, Wisdom gives life and light, meaning to our lives!

We dare declare that this “Word” (Logos, Sophia, Memra), Jesus Christ is our entre, entrance into knowing God. When we see Christ, we see God; This God of eternity, of time, of love, of justice!

All our other words are made sense of, through this “Word”!

Knowing The Word! Gaining Wisdom!

Amen.