**The Wonder of Wisdom**

**Narrative Lectionary**

October 28, 2018

1 Kings 3: 3-9,10-15,16-28 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Matthew 5: 1-12

In the middle of the monthly Church Council meeting, a pastor is visited by an angel, who tells him, “Because of your unselfish and exemplary service, I will reward you with either wisdom, wealth, or beauty.” “Give me wisdom,” the pastor replies without hesitation. “Done!” says the angel. All heads turn to the pastor, who sits with a slight halo around his head. “Well,” says the president of the congregation, “say something brilliant.” The pastor stands and with the wisdom of Solomon says, “I should have taken the money.”

What gift would you ask for? If you had a dream or an angel came to you and asked, ‘what gift shall I give you’ what would you ask for? Money, wealth, fame, wisdom, patience, faith, love, peace, joy? There are many things one could ask for. Some more self-serving and others self-less. I invite you to consider this and you will have an opportunity later in the service to choose a gift to take with you for reflection and prayer.

This week I experienced the gift of wisdom as I had a conversation with the Joint Needs Assessment Committee about our present situation, my hopes or vision for the congregation, the church, and potential opportunities and challenges. It was clear that the committee has done some thinking about what is important for us as a congregation and community and will be asking you to do the same. There is great wisdom in this. They talked about table stakes – what are the things that are so important to us as a community, that we cannot give them up. Next week we will take some time in the service for the JNAC committee to invite us to consider some questions and share our wisdom on what is important and what our priorities are for this congregation and this church. We will be sharing our collective wisdom.

When Solomon was asked in our story today what gift he wanted to receive, he asked for an understanding mind and the ability to discern between good and evil so that he would be a good king for the people. Before he asked for this, he expressed gratitude for all that God has done for his father David and now for him that he is King. Earlier this week I retweeted a tweet from [Diana Butler Bass](https://dianabutlerbass.com/books/grateful-the-transformative-power-of-giving-thanks/) author of Grateful, which I named as wisdom. She tweeted:

How to resist the evil of this moment?

"If you're grateful, you're not fearful, and if you're not fearful, you're not violent...If you are grateful, you are enjoying the differences btwn people, and you are respectful to everyone." -Br David Steindl-Rast

Gratitude. That's how.

Arianna Huffington in her book [Thrive](http://ariannahuffington.com/thrive) in struggling with exhaustion and success, identifies a third metric of success, which includes the practice of gratitude. She lists them as:

* Understanding life as a classroom where we can learn even from our struggles
* Practicing and expressing gratitude
* Paying attention to our intuition and interior life
* Appreciating the difference between information and wisdom
* Slowing down in our culture of hurry sickness
* Being mindful instead of operating on automatic pilot

There is wisdom here as well and it is interesting how someone who is focused corporately has identified very spiritual elements to true success. Solomon’s request for wisdom was a selfless choice, based on his desire to serve the people and God well. In the story today, it is clear that his support of his people included the lowest of the low, as the two women were the lowest class in the culture but he still made time for them. He had an unorthodox way of determining which woman was the real mother, when he proposed that the baby be shared by cutting it in half. In his wisdom he knew the real mother would not allow this. It is unfortunate that he did not maintain this selflessness and wisdom as later in his life, he enslaved people to build not only the temple but his palace as well. He also had hundreds of wives and began to worship their gods thus losing favour with God, and breaking his promise to God to be faithful when he received the gift of wisdom. It is a reminder that not all leaders are perfect, indeed none of us are.

So what is wisdom? Wisdom can be defined as: *the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense and insight. Wisdom is associated with attributes such as compassion, experiential self-knowledge, non-attachment and virtues such as ethics and benevolence.* We can also clearly see that we experience much wisdom from Jesus. Indeed, he is very much part of the Wisdom tradition and wisdom teachers as Cynthia Bourgeault writes about in her book [The Wisdom Jesus](https://www.amazon.ca/Wisdom-Jesus-Transforming-Mind-Perspective/dp/1590305809), Transforming Heart and Mind – a New Perspective on Christ and His Message. In it she explores some of the traditional teaches of Jesus and what he really meant as a wisdom teacher.

One of Jesus’ main teachings was about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. He often spoke of the kingdom, but it wasn’t like the kingdom they lived in, and it wasn’t like any kingdom anyone had ever visited, and it wasn’t even like any kingdom anyone had ever heard of. He talked about the kingdom of Heaven being like this or that, or that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you and the Kingdom of Heaven is here. Some in the church, particularly conservative evangelicals has understood the kingdom of heaven to be the place you go when you die. But then how can it be within us? Others, like many of us, interpret it to mean an earthly utopia, that we are to work to create the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Bourgeault [points out](https://cac.org/the-kingdom-of-heaven-2017-04-11/) that Jesus rejected this meaning when his followers wanted to proclaim him messiah, he unequivocally stated his kingdom is not of this world. She directs us to Author Jim Marion’s contemporary suggestion that the Kingdom of Heaven is a state of consciousness:

“it is not a place you go to, but a place you *come from”,* She writes, [1] “It is a whole new way of looking at the world, a transformed awareness that literally turns this world into a different place. Marion suggests specifically that the Kingdom of Heaven is Jesus’ way of describing a state we would nowadays call “nondual consciousness” or “unitive consciousness.” The hallmark of this awareness is that it sees no separation—not between God and humans, not between humans and other humans. *These are indeed Jesus’ two core teachings, underlying everything he says and does.”*

We are all one, interconnected in love and Divine energy.

Jesus said that the Father and I are one, and Abide in me as I in you. Bourgeault says there is no separation between humans and God because of the “mutual inter-abiding which expresses the indivisible reality of divine love. We flow into God and God into us because it is the nature of love to flow.”

Love your neighbour as yourself is the next teaching to explore, to see that there is no separation between humans. We often hear it or read it as Love your neighbour as much as you love yourself, but Bourgeault points out, is it love your neighbour as yourself – as a continuation of your own being. It’s a seeing that I and my neighbour are one. We are connected and interconnected. When we see this, our lives and love for one another can transform as well. This is deep wisdom.

The next piece of wisdom teaching of Jesus is the Beatitudes, the *blessed are you* sayings. Bourgeault [reviews](https://cac.org/be-receptive-or-be-open-2017-04-16/) all of the blessings from a wisdom teaching perspective but I will share a just few of them here. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Cynthia writes:

From a wisdom perspective (that is, from the point of view of the transformation of consciousness), “poor in spirit” designates an inner attitude of receptivity and openness; one is blessed because only in this state is it possible to receive anything.

There’s a wonderful Zen story that illustrates this teaching. A young seeker, keen to become the student of a certain master, is invited to an interview at the master’s house.

The student rambles on about all his spiritual experience, his past teachers, his insights and skills, and his pet philosophies. The master listens silently and begins to pour a cup of tea. He pours and pours, and when the cup is overflowing he keeps right on pouring. Eventually the student notices what’s going on and interrupts his monologue to say, “Stop pouring! The cup is full.”

The teacher says, “Yes, and so are you. How can I possibly teach you?”

Jesus is calling us to be always open to learning and spiritual growth.

The other blessing I wish to share Bourgeault’s perspective on, is b*lessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*. In this, she explores our understanding of righteousness. In Israel during Jesus’ time, righteousness is something much more dynamic than virtue. She writes:

Visualize it as a force field: an energy-charged sphere of holy presence. To be “in the righteousness of God” (as Old Testament writers are fond of saying) means to be directly connected to this vibrational field, to be anchored within God’s own aliveness. There is nothing subtle about the experience; it is as fierce and intransigent a bond as picking up a downed electrical wire. To “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” then, speaks to this intensity of connectedness.

Jesus promises that when the hunger arises within you to find your own deepest aliveness within God’s aliveness, it will be satisfied—in fact, the hunger itself is a sign that the bond is already in place.

Righteousness, then is like seeking right relationship with God and as a result, with others. When we are alive in and with God, we feel connected with everything.

This wisdom teaching can be challenging as it is does not fit with our usual thinking and even beliefs. It can bring new perspective and different possibilities for insight and can give us pause, which causes us to reflect. As we move through these times together, in our lives, in our community, in our church may we draw on wisdom, and wisdom teachings drawing on compassion, insight, experience, understanding and love.