

**13th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**August 19, 2018**

Text: Ephesians 5:15-20

Theme: Be Wise

I just returned from sunny California while Deacon Erin just returned from a weekend of helping her son get settled at his new college. Our older youth are returning to their institutions of higher learning and our younger youth will start classes next week. It is a good Sunday to talk about *wisdom* – the wisdom of taking time off to rest and enjoy good quality family time and the wisdom of preparing for another school year dedicated to learning new and exciting things.

In our readings for this week the word *wisdom* is well defined for us. It goes beyond mere insights and knowledge. In the Old Testament lesson *wisdom* is portrayed as a woman. She invites people to come to her banquet that offers those who eat the fullness of life with God. In the epistle lesson true wisdom is shown in how we conduct ourselves. And in our gospel lesson Jesus demonstrates his wisdom by using the feeding of the five thousand as an opportunity to talk about the bread of life.

I frequently think about wisdom because I want to make consistently good and wise decisions as your pastor. I want to offer my children helpful guidance when I am asked. I want to make smart choices when it comes to my own health and well-being. I want to be wise although I am fully aware that human wisdom is always flawed.

Remember the story of the Greek philosopher, Socrates. He was this eccentric, little man who at one point in his career was declared the wisest man alive. When he learned of the announcement he was dumbfounded. He did not have the credentials for such a bold statement to be made about him. He was not a writer. His teachings were not well known. So he started his own crusade to prove everyone wrong. He interviewed the greatest people in Athens to see what wisdom they possessed. If he could find someone who demonstrated greater wisdom than him – then he would prove the judgment to be a huge mistake.

In his retelling of the story Socrates said he met this one wise man and gave him a thorough examination. He concluded that in the eyes of others (and especially in the eyes of the man himself) the man appeared to be wise when in fact he was not. The man consistently overestimated the extent of his knowledge. He pretended to know things that he really knew nothing about.

As he walked away Socrates decided he was certainly wiser than this man in one critical aspect. Socrates did not know more than the man but he was quite aware of his own ignorance. He was wiser because he knew what he did not know and he was prepared to admit it.

According to Socrates, to be wise is to recognize our limitations and to be prepared to admit them. We know people who can offer us good, practical sage advice but then they will turn around and fail to live by their own counsel. We know people who are really smart but they have unhealthy lifestyles. In Scripture we always point to Solomon as the good and wise king yet he made some appalling and unethical decisions that eventually led to the downfall of his kingdom.

Wisdom comes over time and with age. It comes when we listen to others and learn from them. It comes through our experiences and most certainly through our mistakes. Wisdom indicates a deeper understanding of our relationship with God. It is not simply a combination of knowledge and intelligence. It is more a matter of knowing how to steer a path through life (and its challenges) in ways that bring us a sense of peace and well-being.

*Be careful then how you live (not as unwise people) but as wise.*

*Make the most of the time because the days are evil.*

It is the *wise* who see that every day is a new day begun in Christ. If we are truly awakened from the sleep of sin and death then our lives will not follow the ways of the world. On the one hand the world teaches us that on any given day there is never enough time. We constantly rush through every moment absorbed in our desire to be productive. We seek to accomplish the most in a 24-hour period. On the other hand the world teaches us that in the terms of our mortality we have plenty of time and that we should not let anything hold us back even if it seems unwise. Both are paths of the foolish.

Wise people are good and honest stewards of their time.

They will seek opportunities to do justice and to live boldly.

I love the comparable verses from Galatians 6 which reads –  
*So then let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have the opportunity, let us work for the good of all.*

Having turned away from the old self to the new, our lessons for today beckon us to focus on that which builds up the body of Christ. We cannot waste the precious time we have on this earth doing those things that are counterproductive to his grace and mercy. We are to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that our songs of praise to God will be heard by the whole world. We are to be so filled with the Spirit that we will work together to build each other up and we will stop tearing each other down – especially those with whom we disagree. We may not be able to stop others from doing their *thing* or saying whatever comes out of their mouths but we most certainly can stop ourselves from being critical all the time. We can curb our language and refuse to speak words of retaliation.

Our time is better spent discovering ways to execute justice instead of judgment.

And most importantly, we hear today that as wise people we are to be so filled with the Spirit that we will give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to receive the day the Lord has made and be assured that God is in it. The days may be evil but our lives are not evil and the One who gives us life is all good. We may be susceptible to powers that cloud our vision and deceive us but with the wisdom that can only come from God we can keep our focus on the truth.

Human wisdom is flawed but there are a few traits that wise people tend to have in common. Wise people learn from life experiences. Wise people soak up lessons wherever they are and they learn from the wisest teacher of all – Jesus Christ. Christ teaches us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Christ teaches us that the foolish will build their houses on sand but the wise will build their houses on rock. It is the wise who can manage the smaller problems and be ready to tackle the bigger crisis.

They understand it is not by their will or their strength that these things will be accomplished but they will rest on the will and strength of God. Wise people surround themselves with a community of faith who help them understand they are not alone in this journey called life. And as Socrates so eloquently stated: Wise people have such a keen understanding of themselves that they will know their limits and are prepared to admit them.

Summer vacations come to an end. Another academic year is quickly upon us. In the wisdom of Christ let us make the most of our time to do what is right and to work for the good of all. Christ offers us the bread of life that offers us the fullness of life. True wisdom is how we conduct ourselves. Our time is best spent executing justice and not judgment. We ask for such wisdom. Amen