

Pastor T.C. Arnold
17th Sunday after Trinity
Proverbs 25:11
September 27th, 2015

Mark Twain once quipped, “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.” What we say and how we say it is important. The words we choose and the tone we use can make a big difference on how people will react, how people will understand, and how people may receive an impression of you or what you represent. Words are important.

In the Old Testament text for today from Proverbs chapter twenty-five, the writer mentions in verse eleven, “*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.*” In other words, the right words are quite valuable. This verse notes that a well-spoken and well-timed comment is as beautiful as gold and silver jewelry. The saying, however, does not say what that particular comment and the proper time are. Only the person who acquires wisdom from God’s Word and observes life’s workings in the world can learn this. That is what the Proverbs are all about. That is why they call this book, “the book of wisdom” and the words “wisdom literature.”

Wisdom is different than knowledge. A wise person knows what to speak and how to speak. Sometimes a wise person may not say anything at all. But when he does speak, he speaks a beautiful word – it’s meaningful and substantive. A knowledgeable person may know every right word but have no idea how to say it and when to say it. Though it is good to be knowledgeable, it is better to be wise.

And you know where wisdom comes from. Yes, from the Lord – Jesus is wisdom personified. Wise were His words about rescuing on the Sabbath day and taking the lowest seat at the table in the Gospel reading for today. Wisdom, experience – been there, done that – teaches these lessons more than just knowledge. Parents, you know. And children, you will know. I know that all you teenagers out there think you smarter than your parents. Maybe you are. My boys are getting better grades in school than I ever did. They got their mother’s brains. But there is a quality that will always elude you until you reach the age of your parents. Wisdom. So, to put it bluntly, your parents know more than you.

So does God know more than all of us? I don’t think we would dispute that sitting here in church this morning. Psalm 111 says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” In Proverbs it says, “*Fools despise wisdom and instruction,*” and “*The Lord gives wisdom,*” and it says in the New Testament, “*Jesus became for us the wisdom of God*” (1 Cor. 1). Nothing can be wiser than wisdom itself and since Jesus is wisdom personified, that about sums it up.

But yet we sinners love to live without wisdom – or – with our wisdom over and above God’s wisdom. When the law calls us to be faithful, we may come up with all sorts of different excuses why we couldn’t be faithful to that one person, in that one situation, to our one true Lord. We talk ourselves out of God’s wisdom all the time. Our situation dictates our needs and if our needs go against God’s law, well then that’s the way it is, we think. We can justify our actions that break God’s law all the time. “I had to lie..., I had to take. I had to throw them under the bus to protect myself. I had to do it...” Our wisdom is greater than God’s. It never is but we talk ourselves into thinking so. And even if we don’t think so, we “do” our wisdom anyway... especially if following God’s law is not the popular option. “It’s only this once...,” we say. “I know it’s not right but it will make me happy...,” we reason. “It won’t hurt anyone if no one finds out,” we think.

“*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold...*” And a word fitly spoken is one that does not contradict the Word of God. A word fitly spoken is spoken in the correct tone. A word fitly

spoken may be just a word and not a whole lot of them. Wisdom dictates how this word is shared. All of us can call to mind someone in our lives who could do this better than most. And for me, and maybe for many of you, it was from a pastor. Wise words that came from our dear pastor emeritus, the pastor here for many years, a mentor and a father figure to me, Pastor Krueger.

For those who don't know, we lost our beloved Pastor Krueger on Monday night. As a new pastor fresh out of the seminary, wise words just seemed to ooze from his mouth at every turn. All I had to do is sit and listen. But, of course, there were times I thought I knew better. I would not take the good ole pastor's advice and venture out on my own – usually with unconstructive effects. A great opportunity would then arise for the old crotchety Sr. Pastor with more years of experience as a pastor than I was old to say, "See I told you so." The words of wisdom are what we tend to remember. The wise words that go along with more than just a nugget of information for you to consider. Wise words that go beyond his "Thus saith the Lord" (wise enough words indeed). No, rather, wisdom that comes from the Lord when comfort is needed for a grieving family (words that have been spoken from this very place many times). Words that listen closely to troubled hearts and speak only what is needed – comfort, sacrifice, love and a sustaining Lord who brings us through each and every time. Words that we never forget because they are words of wisdom – they are the Lord's words – and there is no better word.

The Word made flesh that dwelt among the people is Jesus – Wisdom personified. He is wisdom in the flesh. And when He spoke, every word was a wise word. When He acted, every action was a wise action. We do well to learn these words and actions and put them to use. But better yet is the way the Lord put them in use for us. Not only did He say what He would do, but He did it exactly the way He planned – to go to the cross and die for you. What a terrible way for all wisdom personified into one man – that is God in the flesh – to carry out your salvation. But it had to be done this way. This was the Lord's will. He must die for you. He must take all your sins upon Himself that Good Friday and conquer death through a perfect death. Not the way I would have liked to see my Lord die. But He knew what had to be done. And thank God my God knows better than me. Because what He did saved me and you.

Twain was wise to say there is a difference between the right word and the wrong word. It can change the meaning, the outcome, and maybe even so much more. Here are God's wise words of life for you – "*You are forgiven of all of your sins in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*" Here are His wise words that are not lacking – "*I am the way the truth and the light, no one comes to the Father except through me*" Here are His wise words to that man on the cross, to you and me on our last day, to Pastor Krueger on Monday, "*Truly, Truly I say to you, Today, you will be with me in paradise.*" You can take that to the bank. More than just something nice to say. These words penetrate our heart and soul and give us what we don't have without Christ.

A fitly word spoken... "I love you and I always will," says the Lord. A fitly word spoken... "You are forgiven," says the Lord. A fitly words spoken... "I am the resurrection... and because I am, so are you." Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.