

Focus: God gives us wisdom.

“There are two ways, one of life and one of death...and there is a great difference between these two ways.”

So opens the *Didache* or “Teaching” of the Apostles, a Christian book so ancient that it predates some of the New Testament.

For the early Christians, being a Christian was not belonging to a church or a part of your biography: “I’m a teacher, a Michigan fan, a Pisces, and a Christian.” It was about the many choices we have to make throughout the course of our lives and the day. The early Christians insisted that being a Christian, choosing the way of life made a real difference in your daily life.

And what was the *way of life*? The *Didache* tells us, “Now this is the way of life: First, you shall love God, who made you. Second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself: but whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another.”

In other words: love God our maker and love your neighbor: live by the Golden Rule. That is it. That is the way of life. It sounds simple enough.

But what I want to say today is that this is not something that just happens without our attention to it. Most of the loudest voices in our world are not telling us to love God and our neighbors.

King Solomon knew this well. Most biblical scholars think he would have been a teenager during this prayer today. His father David has died, and now it his turn to rule the kingdom. And he quickly realizes he is nowhere near up to the job. We notice right away then that the first part of Solomon’s legendary “wisdom” is humility. “God, I can’t do this by myself. This job is too big for me. This nation is too great for me.” For some of us, it may take years to reach that humility. But Solomon gets it right away.

And God asks him what he wants.

What would you ask for? Well, the options that come to mind are mentioned in our text: long life—health, riches, the life of your enemies. There would have been no shame in asking for these things. They were what every king would ask for. And let’s be honest. We still want health and wealth for ourselves—and while don’t usually pray, “Smite mine enemies,” (at least not in church!) we certainly still take smug satisfaction in seeing “what goes around come around” when someone has wronged us.

But Solomon doesn’t ask for any of these things. “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

God gave Solomon a blank check. The young king could have asked for anything. And he asked for *wisdom*.

And God *loves* this prayer. “¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall

compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.”

We might ask why God loves this prayer for wisdom so much. After-all, in asking for wisdom instead of health, wealth, vindication over his enemies, Solomon shows us he already has some wisdom. But what God loves most is what Solomon is *going to do with that wisdom*. Notice how he ends his request, “for who can govern this your great people?”

Solomon asks for wisdom so that he can govern the lives of God’s people. In other words, his prayer is not for himself at all. It is a prayer for the wellbeing of others. “Help me, God, so that I can do some good with this position and these people you have trusted to my care.” In other words, for all the talk of “Wise” King Solomon, it is Solomon’s *heart* more than his *head* that matters to God.

It is a wonderful story, not only about Solomon, but about us, too. We are not called to be kings like Solomon, but we are called to true wisdom. What the Lord requires of us is not head knowledge, not even folksy wisdom, but a heart that loves God and our neighbors first. That is what the *Didache* called the way of life.

And how different the way of life is from the way of death, the way of the world. In this world, no one will blame you for seeking your own interests, your own security, your own wellbeing first. Indeed, it seems like everyone from commercials on TV to politicians is telling us to do just that. For certain individuals, it might even work out well. But look where it’s gotten us.

Look around at the division, the anger, and, yes, the outright *death* we see every day. It seems every day we see the proverb fulfilled, “an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.” Does this look like the way of life?

The apostle Paul tells us that Christ on the cross made foolish the wisdom of the world. On the cross, we see a man deprived of wealth, riches, and triumph over his enemies—everything the world values—who somehow rises from the dead. God’s way of life is different from what we supposed. The way of life goes through faith, love, self-sacrifice.

Every day through our words and actions, we have a choice to make: life or death, me or my neighbors, the world or the cross. And what a great difference our choices will make for ourselves and for our neighbors. Together may we pray for the grace to choose wisely. **Amen.**