

“A Heart for Wisdom”

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Texts: 1 Corinthians 1: 1-17 and 1 Corinthians 2: 1-16

“It was in this world of constant comparison and competition that the Corinthian church struggled to find its identity.” Thank heaven those days are over! There is no one who is competing for your attention right now! But in Corinth, not like today (note the sarcasm), “believers were tempted to bring those same standards into the life of the church—dividing themselves by loyalties to certain leaders— ‘I belong to Paul, or I belong to Aolos, or I belong to Cephas, or I belong to Christ. (1 Corinthians 1: 11-13; 3: 4-7)” These were several philosophical schools and public speakers of the day, “where clever words and rhetorical polish often mattered and were considered as ‘truth”. Could you imagine such a time? All kinds of people running around telling you the “truth” and spouting you their “wisdom” and asking you to join their side? Sounds crazy, doesn’t it. Through all the fog, the Apostle Paul was imploring that people seek wisdom, not just the latest craze. I implore you to seek wisdom as well, especially as we enter the last ten days of the election cycle.

In case you didn’t already know, Corinth was not an ordinary city. According to Rev Kyeong Jung Kim, it was a bustling hub of commerce and culture, strategically located on the isthmus connecting northern and southern Greece. Merchants, sailors, and travelers from across the empire poured through its ports, making Corinth a wealth and

cosmopolitan center.” The people there were being exhorted by Paul to “distinguish between the ‘wisdom of the is age’ and the ‘wisdom of God destined for our glory before time began (1 Corinthians 2: 6-7).”

Does any of this sound familiar? I’m quite sure it does. There are all kinds of people speaking these days, but it is really hard to sort through all the noise to find what truth is—let alone wisdom. It is because we may be looking for wisdom in the wrong places. “Too often, we might expect wisdom to be found in the halls of power, in the decisions of the elites, or the voices of authority. But Paul insists that God’s wisdom is hidden from those obsessed with control, from those consumed with protecting their status, or clinging to their privilege. Paul’s warning is real that they often miss what God is doing right in front of them, because it does not fit the categories they trust and hold.” I think it is very possible that we, too, may suffer in the same way. It is perfectly okay to follow someone’s thinking, to read their ideas and consider their proposals, but when we give away our own ability to seek wisdom, we can often find it in exactly the wrong places.

Paul presses the point further: the wisdom of God is not something that the Corinthians could access through success, wealth, education, or rhetoric, but is revealed as gift to those who live by the Spirit. Then Paul goes into his own defense, which we may come back to later, but stay with this point a minute. Stop and consider where you get your information from; how you come to wisdom; how it is that you arrive at knowing who and what to believe and to follow. (Pause here)

On Wednesday of this week, I was able to get out in the woods again. It wasn't very long I got to hike, but I got out there. I realized at one point that I was constantly looking at the ground. Yes, one needs to make sure there's nothing to trip over, but I mean that I never looked up, never looked around, and never saw anything except my shoes and the trail. Then I looked up! What a beautiful day around me! Some of the leaves were still left on the trees. Chipmunks and squirrels were running around like crazy and making all kinds of noise. The types of trees changed a couple of times – you get the idea. Then I started thinking about wisdom. Where are we looking when we seek wisdom. The truth is that I go to the woods and often seek wisdom there. But there I was, seeking wisdom, without looking around at all. The only thing I found was the front of my shoes! I then thought how much time we spend looking down when we seek wisdom, only we aren't looking at our feet, we are looking at our phones, or our televisions, or even our computers. Whether we name it or not, it's possible that we're so busy looking for things there, we never look up at can't find anything. And worse, the "wisdom" we do find is like those same people who came to Corinth seeking followers, but distracting us from following the one we have chosen—Jesus Christ.

Further, "God's wisdom is not another strategy for getting ahead in...competitive society. It is not rooted in human brilliance and public performance, but in spiritual discernment—a wisdom revealed by the Spirit and often dismissed as foolishness by the world. As Paul insists earlier in his letter, 'The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.'"

Discernment. That's what we spend far too little time practicing. That's what I was spending too little time practicing on my hike. I was thinking about this issue and that issue and this stressor and that one. I was thinking about the election, but really, I was thinking about things much closer to home. Most of all, I was trying to get a sermon together! 😊 At the same time, I was doing everything wrong to get there.

I don't know if my experience translates to yours, but at least for me, I find over and over again that when I concentrate on a problem too much, I often miss the simple solution right in front of me. And once I open to that, then a whole lot comes along with it! Not only did I find my sermon, but I found some ways forward in something troubling me with a non-profit that I work with. I also found some answers to why I was a bit upset or flat that morning. Most of all, I found a sense of peace so that anything else could get in my mind besides the immediate problems I was focused upon. Maybe one of the reasons we fight so much in our world is all of us are doing the same thing...just looking down hoping to find what we're looking for.

The author I referred to this morning reminds us that there is nothing wrong with wanting to be secure, to rest, to take care of ourselves and our loved ones. And yet, we are called not to confuse cultural norms with spiritual wisdom—not to baptize the American Dream as if it were the gospel. We tell ourselves that climbing higher must mean we are closer to God. And we'll follow anyone to get there! We often compare ourselves to others, including the megachurch down the street wondering if our sanctuary should be fuller or

our programs shinier. We are tempted to measure health by numbers instead of by love, by budgets instead of by service.

That's why we need interruption. We need to interrupt our "regularly scheduled programming" long enough to look up, look around, and see what God might be saying. And do you know what? We might just be surprised! God might have something to say that no one we look to while looking down every thought about. And listening to God can lead to faith. That kind of faith does not come automatically formed. It must be practiced—like a muscle. Paul once told the Corinthians that faith is like running a race or training like an athlete (1 Corinthians 9: 24-27). The more we practice it the stronger it becomes. The more we stretch ourselves..., the more flexible our hearts grow.

And sooner or later, our muscles formed from practice lead to wisdom, which leads to faith, and then imagine the places we will go! But the first step, the most important step, is to simply look up. We might just find what we've been looking for all along!

May we all develop a heart for wisdom. Through Christ. The one we should truly belong to. Amen.