



WESTMINSTER
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Wisdom's Feast
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1 Kings 3:3-14
Ephesians 5:15-20

In my recent travels, I've taken to listening to podcasts instead of music. One show that has particularly caught my attention is called "The Dirtbag Diaries." It is exactly what it sounds like. Basically it is a show put on by a bunch of people who live in their vans and chase adventure. A few episodes I've heard lately include "The Glacier Project," where a young man attempts to ski all the glaciers in Washington State. He was unsuccessful. I also heard an episode about a game that I am all but certain our own Ed Sutter had a hand in creating. It's called the "Flyathlon," and it's a 10 mile running race through the woods, during which you have to catch a fish. I've also enjoyed an episode called "Escape from Beacon Rock," where a father and daughter get stuck on a rock all and have to spend the night perched on a tiny ledge.

You know what episode of the Dirtbag Diaries I haven't heard yet? I haven't heard the episode that goes "Our team set out to climb this mountain, and then we climbed it without incident, and went home happy." That's not an adventure! Adventure is the journey, both the parts that are planned, that go exactly as expected, smooth sailing, AND the incredible disruptions, the near calamities, the almost disasters. It's both all at once.

I think that life is more like that then we care to admit. Life comes with those perfect moments, where we make our plans and execute. It comes with those times where we find the path and stick to it. It comes with those times when everything goes right.

And it comes with those moments where we lose the path It includes those moments when things blow up on us. It includes those moments that the light fades to darkness. It includes the moments we get lost.

I am convinced that the best adventure stories are told about how we get from those lost places back to the path, back to the familiar. And in life, I am convinced that the best way to do that is through wisdom.

When you think of hockey, you think of Sidney Crosby. When you think of jazz, you think of Miles Davis. And when you think about wisdom, you think about King Solomon. Here's a bit of background about our wise king. Solomon starts out as a scandal. He is the first living son of King David and Bathsheba, with whom David committed adultery and had her husband killed. And if that sounds a bit like Game of Thrones to you, it's because that is basically what Solomon's whole childhood was like. His brothers and half-brothers are always trying to kill their father and assume the throne. And in between all of that, there's inter-family drama the likes of which no respectable network would put on their air. And I'm betting that young Solomon watched it all, and took it all in.

Eventually, David dies and Solomon is made the king. There are a few little clues that things are a bit off the rails from the start in this story. Early in chapter three, we hear that Solomon makes a political marriage alliance with Egypt. If we were a first century Jew reading this, alarms would be going off. Egypt? The ones who enslaved us? The ones we had to escape from? The first five books of the Bible, that whole story? You married...her?

When then hear another clue in what Louise read for us this morning. Solomon sacrificed at the high places. This might be easy to miss at first, but the high places were shrines that had been set up by other nations to worship their gods, like Baal. So when the King of Israel, God's King, shows up and starts worshipping at high places, we might again find ourselves asking some questions.

It's in the midst of this that God shows up and asks Solomon what he wants. There are no strings or conditions attached. It is just God showing up to Solomon and asking "What do you need?" How would you answer such a question? For sure my request would include season tickets. But instead of being selfish, with all of his past in mind, the family drama, the unstable kingdom, the marriage alliance with a long held enemy, the worship of other gods, Solomon's request is remarkably self-aware.

"I do not know how to go out or come in."

It's like Solomon basically says "I have no idea what I'm doing!" But I appreciate that there is motion in his request. He doesn't know how to move. I think Solomon is pointing out something vital for us. There is movement to be had, growth to be experience, actions to be taken, and Solomon is lost. The adventure of life has led him somewhere he knows he doesn't want to be, and he wants to find a way back. So Solomon asks God for a map. He asks God for wisdom.

I turned to the source of all knowledge in the universe, Google, for a definition of wisdom. Google defines it as "the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgement." I think this is a really good definition for wisdom. My experience has been that having each element of that

definition is a good way to keep on track and that lacking in them leads to trouble.

Take experience for instance. On Friday, I was driving a friend to his hotel, and it happened to be in a part of Pittsburgh with which I have absolutely zero experience. We have, for reasons that escape me, decided to build our traffic grid upon a triangle. And so no matter the GPS in my car, my lack of knowledge with that area forced me to turn around an embarrassing three times.

What about knowledge? The other night I went out for a bike ride at night. For cyclists, I think the night ride is the best. It's way cooler than the midday heat, it's a bit more peaceful, a bit more focused. I have a little headlight on the front of my bike, which is basically enough to let other cars know where I am, and light the road just a bit in front of my wheel. As I was zooming down a hill a bit more quickly than I should have been in the dark, I could see something moving on the road just a bit in front of me. I didn't have any knowledge about what it is. The fact that the skunk in question *didn't* spray me is evidence of God's love and providence.

By and large, I don't think that many of us exhibit a lack of good judgement. But at least for me one of the areas I do exhibit poor judgement is when I'm staring at a trail in the woods for hiking, and over-estimating my abilities. "Yeah, I'm *totally* up for that!" When I misjudge my abilities, when I misjudge how challenging a task is, the event usually ends with me calling for a ride home while covered in mud.

In granting Solomon's request, God is essentially saying that wisdom is the key to staying on God's path through life. God conditions the good life that he promises Solomon by saying

“If you walk in my ways...” which opens up the door to say that there are in fact some other ways to walk, and they are not so good.

The wisdom of our culture is not the wisdom of God. Take a look at the list of things God is pleased that Solomon *doesn't* request. This list does not include long life, riches, and the life of his enemies. Aren't those the kind of things that our culture holds up as wise right now? Isn't it wise to do everything you can to fight aging, to put death in his place, to live as long as possible? Isn't it wise to manage your finances well, to work super hard, to accumulate a lot of stuff, to keep up with the Joneses? And even if we don't seek the life of our enemies, isn't it wise to seek to shame them? To make sure they are a notch or two below us? To perhaps tweet nasty things about those we dislike? Those things can feel like wisdom, but God seems to say that there's a path that leads to a good life, full of riches and goodness, that is in fact more wise.

So how do we get to that path? Perhaps if we took Google's definition and applied it to our faith, we would see a way forward.

Each of us has experiences with God both big and small. I remember a few years ago Sarah and I went to see Niagara Falls. There's one place near the railing that you can stand right next to the falls, and actually feel the concrete vibrate beneath your feet. It was so powerful, so overwhelming, that I was sure I was standing next to the presence of God. I have also experience God on a particularly bad day in a small cup of coffee and a few quiet moments to myself. I think that perhaps some of our biggest problems with collecting our experiences with God are that the big moments are admittedly rare, and the small moments are

easy to overlook. It's easy to dismiss God's action in our lives as a coincidence, or luck, or even confuse it with our own action.

Like many of us, I have a little notebook that I use as a day planner and journal. I use it to keep track of my appointments and my tasks throughout the day. Most of us use these tools as a way to look forward. But I realized that at the end of each day, I had created a little document of everything I had done through the day. So as often as I can I sit down to mark where I think I saw God moving in my day right there in my planner. I think this is important because the way we experience God in the past will help us see how we're going to experience God on the path moving forward.

We can continue to grow in our knowledge of God. In Deuteronomy, God tells his people exactly what God expects of them. "You shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:5) Which is very interesting, because Jesus amends that list in Mark. "You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30) It would appear that to Jesus, the knowledge we carry about God is rather important.

Now of course, we ought to offer a warning here. God cannot be contained in our understanding. You cannot read the Bible enough to completely comprehend the wholeness of God. You cannot study enough theology to carry the blueprint of the cosmos (though, seminary students will certainly try). While I've given this warning in sermons before, I wonder if the warning has gotten a bit ahead of itself. I wonder if some of us have decided that if we can't fully understand God, why bother? I think so many of us approach the Bible as a homework assignment, when I see it

instead as an open invitation from God to understand God better. It's as if God is calling to us from the Bible's pages, "come on in and get to know me!" When we study, when we see the way others have walked the path of God, when we see how they may have fallen of the path of God, when we see how God brought them back to the path, it becomes a little easier to find our way to the path for ourselves.

Incidentally, Jesus reminds us in John that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Therefore, all truth is God's truth. All knowledge is God's knowledge. All wisdom is God's wisdom. Therefore, the move in our world to reject knowledge, to fear science, to muddy the waters of truth, is actually to turn our backs on the wisdom of God, and needs to be called out as such.

How do we live in to an evolving understanding of our judgements in light of faith? For this, we need a little bit of brain science! Each of us has a section of our brain known as the pre-frontal cortex. This is where the rational, logical, decision making portion of the brain lives. It's a bit like the brain's CEO. It makes all the decisions.

Youth pastor side note: this area of the brain is significantly underdeveloped in teens. So when a teenager does something unwise, and a parent says "What were you thinking?" A teen will reply "I don't know!" and they mean it.

Behind the pre-frontal cortex is the Amygdala. This is where fear comes from for us. It's our lizard brain. This is where our fight or flight reflexes come from.

In between the two is the Anterior Cingulate, which serves as the brain's fulcrum. It's what makes sure that we aren't emotionless robots, just processing information. And it's the

same thing that makes sure we aren't wimpy wrecks every time we see a snake in the back yard.

It turns out that whichever part of the brain is more developed in us will likely be how we see God. Those with a more highly developed pre-frontal cortex will see God as an engineer, rational, and decision making. If you have a more highly developed amygdala, you are likely to see God as something to be feared, something wrathful, something dangerous. However, the more you work on your anterior cingulate, the more you form that portion of the brain, the more you can make balanced judgements about who God is. Scientists have discovered that if you pray for eight to ten minutes a day, and include in that time some faith based singing, you will see a 50% increase in the strength of your anterior cingulate in just 2 months. The way we pray actually changes our mind. The word actually becomes flesh in us.

And while this may all be flashy new brain science, it turns out that Paul was on to this pretty early. He tells us that staying on God's path is when we "sing psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We don't engage in disciplined devotional time because it's the right thing to do, but because it can actually train us in judgement. It can help us balance when God needs to be logical and rational, and when God needs us to have some emotion. It can help us see God as beyond ourselves, outside of our own logic and fears, and make sense of what that God outside of us is calling us to.

A little bit later in life, Solomon starts writing some thoughts down for his children, and he has some interesting things to say about all of this wisdom he has collected.

Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
“You that are simple, turn in here!”
To those without sense she says,
“Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”

Solomon uses the image of a feast of wisdom, not a snack. A feast that is open and available to all, and I think for good reason. There is no end to the ways we can grow in the wisdom of God. There is no limit on the amount we can experience God in our lives, in experiences both big and small. It's a feast of experience, adventure, and love. There is no ceiling for our ability to grow in our knowledge of who God is. It's a feast of information, knowledge, and growth. There is no shortage of choices to make in our days, or ways for us to exercise our judgement, to grow our brains in the way of the Lord.

Even when I get lost in Pittsburgh's ridiculous traffic patterns, I am comforted by the reassuring voice of the GPS that calmly repeats “Recalculating...recalculating...recalculating.” No matter how screwed up I get that tiny device seems to find a way to set me back on the right course.

The truth about wisdom's feast, and the immense love of God from which it comes is that no one is too lost to get home. If you find that the adventure has slipped away from you a bit, and you can't find the path, wisdom has a feast for

you. If you find that you've made some choices that are less than satisfactory, wisdom has a feast for you. If the light has indeed turned to darkness, and you can't find your way home, wisdom has a feast for you.

So my friends, fed with wisdom and ready for the journey, let's have an adventure shall we?



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