

Week Four (Trinity XVI)

Listening to the wise

Lectionary readings

Proverbs 31:10 – end
Psalm 1

James 3:13 – 4:3, 7 – 8a
Mark 9:30 – 37

Collect

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers of your people who call upon you; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

The collect prays for wisdom that we may 'perceive and know' what we ought to do.

Whose wisdom?

But, as the letter of James makes clear, there is a wisdom which is 'earthly, unspiritual, devilish' and a wisdom from above, which is 'pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits.' One primary focus is those 'who make peace'.

There are choices to be made - as the Psalmist illustrates in his contrast between what he calls '*the way of the righteous*' and '*the way of the wicked*'. (Psalm 1:6).

In the Gospel, when the disciples are arguing (about who was the greatest), Jesus helps them 'perceive and know what they ought to do'. He reminds them about their choices; their priorities. The way of discipleship is the way of service. '*Whoever wants to be the first, must be the servant of all*' (Mark 9:35).

It is when we follow Christ and the way of the Cross, in response to his grace, that we experience the God of hope who gives us joy and peace. We are called to faith and action in trusting response to the God made known by the Holy Spirit in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord of all life. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)

Wisdom for today



In response to the threat of runaway climate change, we need to find wisdom:

- **A wisdom based in truth** - and that means listening to the climate scientists – among today's prophets. We need to pray that we may perceive and know God's will and God's ways.

Prophets are those who speak truth, usually uncomfortable truth to their generation. In ancient Israel, prophets were always overshadowed by false prophets, representing the ruling powers. We must listen to the scientists warning us of approaching dangers, exercise discernment, and be wary of 'false prophets' representing the vested interests of the powerful. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)

- **A wisdom that is 'peaceable'** - which makes for 'Shalom', a word which celebrates human well-being and flourishing at all levels of life.

Can we begin to identify the things which make for human flourishing, and also makes for the wellbeing of all God's creatures?

- **The wisdom of simplicity**

Notice the embarrassment of the disciples about the fact they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest and they realised **Jesus knew**.

Jesus highlighted the value of the directness and simplicity of children. Wisdom from the prophets (which includes today's scientists) is one valuable form of wisdom, but the simplicity of children is another, as is the lives of those who have chose to live simply, joyfully and sustainably.



To live simply and sustainably contributes significantly to human flourishing.

- **Wisdom as practical service**

One example of practical wisdom is given in the Old Testament reading from Proverbs 31 about a wise woman living sustainably. It is a picture of an ordinary home - maybe an illustration of what God's wisdom looks like when dressed in the 'working clothes' of the kitchen and the field. God's wisdom is no mere esoteric concept which floats in some mystical realm out of touch with the ordinary world. God's wisdom is expressed in service: in creativity, responsibility, providing for the needs of others, concerned for the education welfare and growth of others, taking a stand on the side of the poor. Wisdom embodied – wisdom lived out.

We must use our power wisely to promote the flourishing of future generations and the diversity of life on earth. This is the responsibility of every Church and every believer. To seek justice for all, for present and future generations, our authorities must encourage and enable all people to live fairly and sustainably. Acting justly requires us to hold our governments and corporations to account. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)

Questions for further discussion and exploration

1. The scientists, who can be the prophets of today, are warning of probable calamity if we do not change our ways, but so many people are not listening. Whose job is it to make their call more audible? How can we encourage each other to act on their

warnings? Why are our governments and corporations seemingly determined not to hear?

2. Soren Kierkegaard wrote:

The matter is quite simple. The Bible is easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know that the minute we understand, we are obliged to act accordingly. Take any word in the New Testament and forget everything except pledging yourself to act accordingly. My God, you will say, if I do that my whole life will be ruined. How would I ever get on in the world?

3. How can we as a church learn to exercise discernment over the often confusing or conflicting messages regarding climate change?

An Operation Noah Prayer

Creator God, how deep are your designs!
You made a living earth, cloud, rain and wind,
And charged us with their care.

We confess that the way we live today
Is changing the climate, the seas and the balance of life,
Dispossessing the poor and future generations.
Build our lives into an Ark for all creation,
And, as you promised Noah never to repeat the flood,
So make us heralds of a new rainbow covenant:
Choosing life for all that is at risk –
For creation, neighbours near and far,
For our children and ourselves
Amen

Closing Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you:
Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming, to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
For you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.