

Advent 2020: “A Cry For Wisdom”

27 December 2020 - Led by Andrew Whiteside

Welcome

Advent Candle Lighting: Rob & Laurie Semke

Call to Worship: Psalm 111

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 328 O Come, All Ye Faithful

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Job 28:12-28; Colossians 2:1-10a

Reflection: *O Come, Wisdom*

Sermon:

I'm not sure how you would answer the question, “Do you want to know more?” That used to be a tantalising question and we'd be all ears. Now, though, perhaps we've been given too much information. We feel overloaded by information and we want to switch off.

This morning, as part of our series on the great Advent hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”, we look at another way of addressing Christ. Each of the verses are shaped around a biblical term used to describe Jesus. In Latin, this one is called *O Sapientia*. We address Christ, saying “O Wisdom” or, in the words of the hymn to Emmanuel (to God living with us), we pray “O come, O come, Wisdom.”

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high and order all things far and nigh,
to us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go.*

In our first reading in Chapter 28 of the Book of Job, we've just reached the end of a lengthy discourse involving Job and three of his acquaintances. The three claim to be wise concerning the ways of God; explaining to their own satisfaction why Job was suffering — that he had done wrong — and they claimed to have knowledge about the fate of those who did right before God and those who disobeyed God. We all know people like that . . . and often, they are not in the right. In this chapter, however, we read Job's rejection of his acquaintances' opinion about his situation. He asks in Verse 12, “Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?” and insists, “No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living.” We cannot rely on our neighbours as a source of wisdom. So where can wisdom be found? In Verse 23, Job declares, “God understands the way to it and He alone knows where it dwells.”

In this very strange year for our world, there has been a lot of conflicting advice from different sources. Sometimes, even the same sources issued advice that contradicted what they had recently said. Likewise, there were many people who issued instructions as to how to behave and then did the opposite. It was often very hard to know what advice we could rely on.

Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?

Job knew which direction to look in; he knew that God knew! Paul, however, had a deeper sense of where wisdom was to be found. In Chapter 2 of his letter to the Colossians, he wants the Christian believers that he's writing to take on board "that they may have the full riches of complete understanding" and "that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He wants them to embrace Christ as the source of true wisdom and knowledge so that they will always know where they stand. The lives of Christian believers should be informed by Christ. Not by the media; not by politicians; not by the public authorities. If Christ is our source of wisdom, Paul maintains, no one may deceive us by fine-sounding arguments.

We need to make sure that no one takes us captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than on Christ. Through Christ, we're shown the path of knowledge and we can follow it. Through Christ, we can be protected from deception.

Before the pandemic, we might have thought that being deceived with false information might have been just an unfortunate reality but now it might well be a matter of life and death. If we follow false information, it could be dangerous for us and for people we meet. We read in Proverbs 8:34-36 about wisdom: "Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favour from the Lord. But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death."

When I sat down to write a poem about Verse 36, I called it **Self harm**.

Those who miss the point
when Wisdom says
"I know it all.
I will not disappoint;"
those who dismiss the sharpness
of thinking
that wisdom can bring
when they hear it sing so dearly
"I have the solution
to all of your confusion" —
they injure themselves severely,
slashing their prospects of living,
dashing their hopes of thriving
and cutting the supply of faith
in surviving
and so giving up on light
and striving for death.

Whether or not to welcome Christ as Wisdom for our lives is indeed a matter of life and death. To paraphrase Matthew 10:32-33, "Whoever acknowledges the Wisdom of God before others, Christ will also acknowledge as a follower of Wisdom before his Father in Heaven but whoever disowns the Wisdom of God before others, Christ will disown before his Father in heaven."

On this first Sunday of Christmas, we can make up our mind to welcome Christ as wisdom for our lives. We can commit ourselves to making decisions in our lives based on the Word of God and on prayerful interaction with God every day - day in, day out. As we prepare to

start a new year, we can know that if our lives are shaped around the Prince of Peace, we will have peace of mind.

With Christ, there's no need to look around us and ask where wisdom is; it's among us — Emmanuel.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Let us have courage to bring this good news to our friends and neighbours this Christmas and in the year ahead.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Praise: IPH 299 O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Semke Update

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: IPH 305 Angels From The Realms Of Glory

Announcements

Benediction: “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” Colossians 3:16

Discussion & Application

Where do you tend to search for wisdom? Who or what are you most confident in when it comes to asking for advice or counsel?

In Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). They are not merely things to acquire, but rewards enjoyed as a consequence of growing in our relationship with Jesus, depending on Him in any and every situation. Think of one situation in your life right now where you need wisdom. What specific things can you do this week to seek Jesus and depend on Him in that situation?

Reread Colossians 2:1-10. According to Paul, what results when an entire community relies on Christ for wisdom, knowledge and understanding? Consider our own church community, giving thanks to God for where you see evidence of these things and praying into areas where we can grow.