

December 17, 2017
Rev. Karyn Dix
“O Come thou Wisdom”

I love this time of year. Yes, I know that it is a time where outside the church life is filled with too many activities – It’s all about Christmas. But not in the church, and I love that. I love Advent. I love taking the time to slow down and think about what this time of year is really all about. Advent is the only time in the church calendar that Jesus is not a part of our lives. These four weeks of Advent we are living in anticipation of The Birth – In anticipation of what Jesus’ birth brings to us and to the world.

This year we have built our sermons around the Advent Hymn “O Come O Come Emanuel.” This hymn speaks to me. I love that each verse uses a different word or descriptor for the coming Messiah we are all anticipating. This week is 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
Rejoice Rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel



I realize that this isn’t the first sermon I have done on Wisdom, and I’m guessing that it won’t be the last. Wisdom is talked about a lot in the Bible. I decided to go back and read that sermon, to see if I was thinking about wisdom differently. In that sermon I talked about our own personal wisdom. But this verse isn’t talking about finding or developing our own wisdom. It is about asking God to send wisdom – in the form of a person. I believe this because this verse is based off of Isaiah 11:2 (NRSV):

The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

In light of this, as I thought about Wisdom and this verse of O Come O Come Emmanuel I asked myself these questions:

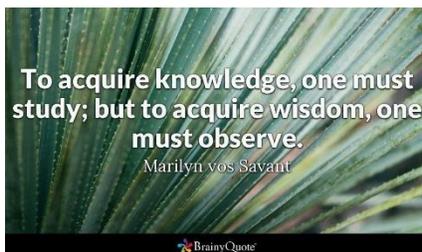
What makes this person we seek wise? Why do we need their Wisdom? And why is it that during Advent, when we are awaiting the birth of the Messiah, are we praying for Wisdom to come to us – to the world?

To answer this first question we need to define wisdom. The Oxford English Dictionary defines wisdom as “ (1)The quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgement; the quality of being wise. (2)The fact of being based on sensible thinking. (3)The body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specified society or period.

I find myself most interested in the first and third pieces of this definition. Although, I do find it funny when a definition uses the root of the word to describe it? Wisdom is the quality of being wise? Really? But those other qualities are important – experience, knowledge, and good judgment. I would agree that those are qualities we look for in people we consider wise. I think in today’s world we often seek out leaders who exhibit knowledge and experience. But does that mean that they are the wise people we desire to follow?

I like how Psychologists expand the idea of wisdom– saying that wisdom is the integration of knowledge, experience, and deep understanding. They add that Wisdom also incorporates tolerance for the uncertainties of life as well as its ups and downs. That in wisdom, there is an awareness of how things play out over time. Wisdom can be acquired only through experience, however, on its own, experience does not automatically translate into wisdom. Psychologists also argue that wise people generally share an optimism that life's problems can be solved and so they experience a certain amount of calm in facing difficult decisions.

I think that this means that wise people have the ability to see the big picture – not just their little piece of the picture, and that wise people have a certain amount of introspection –



they understand how they and others fit into and influence that big picture. They do something special with their experience that encompasses something bigger than themselves. And honestly, when I look around at the world today I am astounded at the lack of wisdom in leaders

around the world. I’m not saying that our leaders are not knowledgeable people or that they

don't have a wealth of experience. I just don't see the integration of their knowledge and experience into wisdom – taking into account a world bigger than their own experience.

I'm not sure I see the larger society seeking wisdom either. People are siloing themselves off into groups of like-minded thinkers, we question each other's news sources, we question each other's motives. We are getting more and more isolated – making it hard to see any bigger picture. And Social Media doesn't help.

And, maybe that is part of why I think this third verse of the song is so powerful. When we sing it we are praying for wisdom to come down, not from human experience or understanding, but wisdom from on high – wisdom from God.

But what does that mean? I think it the third piece of that Oxford English Dictionary definition of wisdom to help us unpack the wisdom we seek. “The body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specified society or period.” For us, that is God's wisdom as unfolded in the Bible. Wisdom is talked about in the Bible a lot. In fact there are five books in the Old Testament that make up what scholars call Wisdom literature: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs. One author I read makes

the argument that this circle of wisdom literature creates the code for Old Testament Biblical wisdom:

Job teaches men to suffer well, the Psalms to pray well, Proverbs to act well, Ecclesiastes to enjoy well,

Song of Songs to love well. I know that these wisdom scriptures are the ones that Jesus would have been raised with. I don't know about you, but I'm not always sure what to do with the wisdom in these scriptures. I often find myself wondering what wisdom God was trying to impart on us.



Maybe that is why Jesus was born when he was. The people had become legalistic in their faith. They looked to the knowledgeable and experienced leaders to tell them the right ways to live out their faith. Those temple leaders were not following God's wisdom. And the people needed God's wisdom to come down to them. They needed a person full of God's wisdom to help them see the life God called them to live. A full life of love and compassion, not a life of rules and regulations, designed to keep everyone in line and in their place. Jesus,

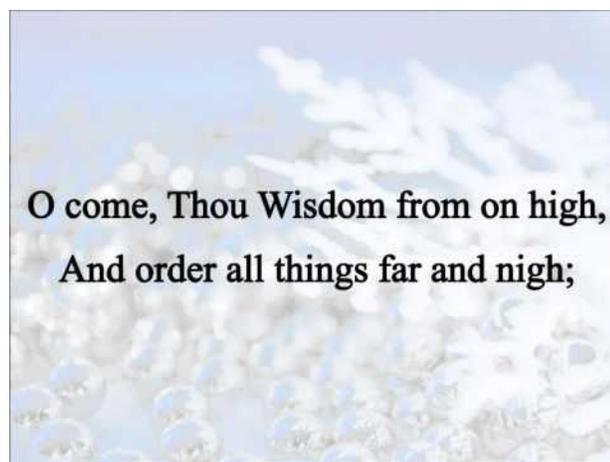
turned their worlds upside down with this teachings – and the unique wisdom he imparted to the world.

For me, that is part of Advent. Honoring the theological piece that Advent is the one time in the Liturgical calendar that Jesus – Christ – Is not with us. It is the time that I reflect on what it is that isn't present when Jesus isn't present. What wisdom is it that Jesus alone brings?

And yes, I believe that all the religions around the world bring wisdom. I spent years away from the church – outside of Christianity – exploring faith traditions – looking for the one that spoke to me – and, I found wisdom in every one. I also came to believe that all the world's religions share certain wisdoms – The Golden rule in some form can be found in the teachings of all religions. However; no matter which religion I was trying out, there was always something missing. Every year, during Advent, I remember what it is that every other religion was missing, Jesus.

Jesus' teachings – Jesus' wisdom that doing good from afar isn't enough - to make a difference in the world we need to be in relationship with people in caring and compassionate ways – and in ways that reach far beyond our limited view of the world. God calls us to be relational in our work for God's kingdom. That is why I am so excited that Murray Hills is a host church for Family Promise. We are getting up close and personal in the work of God's kingdom. I believe that is the unique wisdom Jesus brings us – the wisdom of God's big picture for the world – caring and compassionate web of relationships – that bridge differences.

As I look around the world this Advent season I see such a need for the wisdom of Jesus - Wisdom for the world. "O Come O Come Emmanuel"



O Come O Come Emmanuel
And Ransom Captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appears
Rejoice Rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel
O Come thou Dayspring come
And cheer our spirits by thine Advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And deaths deep shadows put to flight
Rejoice Rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel
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
Rejoice Rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel