

Speaking Words of Wisdom

I think that nearly all of us reading this today might be able to remember where they were and what they were doing on the morning of 11th September, 2001; now twenty years ago yesterday.

Of course, with the benefit of 20 years of hindsight and with the disturbing events of the past month in Afghanistan, in mind we could state that the response of the Western countries to the atrocities of 9/11, were not very wise.

In response to violence of a different sort in the USA in the early 1960's, Martin Luther King wrote a sermon based on the words of Jesus.

“Be you therefore as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves”
(Matthew 10:16)

Faced with injustice, MLK argued that we need to respond with both a tough mind but a tender heart.

At first hearing, you might wonder what the reading we have just heard from James has to do with “words of wisdom”?

However, if you read the whole of James' message you would note that “wisdom” is a major idea of his. Right at the beginning of his message, James in chapter 1, verse 5 states “But if any of you lacks wisdom he should pray to God, who will give it to him because God gives graciously and generously to all.”

Then right after the passage we have just heard/read; James further develops his ideas of wisdom; -

“But wisdom from above is pure, first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy.”

In the verses 1-12 of chapter 3, we have read from James – he gives us wise advice on the care we need to take with the words we speak.

No matter how careful we try to be, I think we all can remember times when we regret words we have spoken.

As parents or teachers, we know the importance of respectful, careful ways of speaking with children.

James uses the example of fire to show the massive effects of one tiny spark in the wrong place. Lately we could also think of the effects of one tiny virus passed on in one moment, in Sydney in June. So, it is with unwise words- spoken or digital. They take on a life of their own.

By contrast if we speak with compassion of love or wisdom, these words can be amazing gifts or blessings to others, and spread around like soft gentle rain.

Often, people think of the problem of “gossip” when reading this text. We can all remember how nearly two years ago false reports on the bush telegraph, about the approaching fires would disturb people and sometimes even endanger lives.

However, an interesting comment on this passage came from Alison Sampson in Melbourne. She has suggested that if we think of “gossip” in its original meaning then it can be a positive and indeed wise way of speaking.

Originally “gossip” was an Old English word meaning “God sib” or God’s siblings – in other words - “sisters and brothers in God”.

The point was then made if we share our stories with our friends here we can get to know each other better and hence love each other better and in fact form a community. This made me think about our faith community here and how much I value both the worship services and the morning teas that follow. In small chats and bit by bit, I’ve learned about places near and far.

Some that I can think of include Albury, Canberra, Flinders Island., Forbes, Hay, Melbourne, New Zealand, “The Shire”, Sydney, Tanzania, Tonga, Townsville, Traralgon, and Young.

But of course, more than a list of names, the sharing of stories from these places has imparted so much experience and wisdom from you all. Many times these stories have also indicated that God has been involved in our individual lives and indeed our common life here. This is perhaps one of the most important and wisest things I have learned from being part of this church through such hard times of fire, flood and pandemic.

We have been talking about “Words of Wisdom” .and how community can help us love and live.

Psalm 19 deals with knowledge in a different language. It states that “All creation tells the Glory of God”.

Chris Goringe, a UCA minister in Sydney, who was a research physicist writes in “With love to the world” that; -
“for me as a person of faith working as a scientist, my work was learning the language of creation, the language in which the heavens, declare their praise of God.”

Martin Luther King also understood that there was no conflict between science and religion.

In the same sermon mentioned earlier, he wrote that “Science gives man knowledge which is power: religion gives man wisdom which is control”

Surely there is deep wisdom in the psalm written about 3,000 years ago. “one day speaks to another. Night with night shares its knowledge and this without speech or language or sound of any voice.”

Verse 7 of the psalm includes the phrase: -

“the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple.”

What are some of the questions that we here in the St George's community during this time of lockdown might pray about and need wisdom for?

We might be concerned about people we know who have been misled about the vaccines and are leaving themselves & others in danger. We also might be concerned about young children and their safety at this time.

We have a congregational meeting tomorrow evening and may be praying for wisdom and guidance as we deal with questions about the future.

When will we be able to have community markets and other activities again?

How should we relate to the resort development about to be built on our doorstep?

Certainly, as James suggested, we should pray for wisdom and believe that God will provide it for us and show us the way forward.

Then as the psalm suggested we should recognise that "the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple."

To me the pre-eminent testimony of the Lord is the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This has been constantly preached and remembered here at St George's.

When David wrote this great psalm, people were very conscious that wars, invasions, famines, pandemics and so forth could be seen as messages from God.

But since Jesus came and preached and lived and died; and now lives by His spirit in the lives of believers everywhere, He has given us an amazing sign of God's love for all creation, and of God's desire that His kingdom should prevail here amongst us on Earth.

As today's gospel reading suggests there is deep wisdom in following Jesus' example of servanthood love.