**Sermon Knowledge and Wisdom** March 2020

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NT Reading: 1 Cor 1: 1-7, 18-31

## 1 Cor 1: 1-7, 18-31

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,5for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

18For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” 20Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.26Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

In 1 Corinthians chapters 1&2, Paul connects Grace with knowledge, and then goes on to show the importance of wisdom. I will argue in a subsequent sermon that wisdom froma religious perspective has an important perspective to addressing the moral challenges from climate change.

I invite you to notice that 1 Corinthians, 1 verse 3 states that grace comes from God and Christ. And then the verses go on to say that this grace given to us enriches in speech and knowledge of every kind. The notion of grace was a primary theme that the reformers believed was the good news of Christ. Paul in this passage in 1 Corinthians tells us it enriches us in every kind of knowledge.

What are we to make of this? Does it mean that knowledge of every kind informs the grace we receive? Does it mean that if we avoid this knowledge, by deciding to remain ignorant, we are not enriched in the grace of God known in Christ?

I suggest to you that to remain in igorance is to diminish or lose the grace of God. There is the knowledge known through the sciences, knowledge known through the arts, knowledge known through spiritual traditions. Our knowledge today is extensive. Biology has given us insights about sexuality, and how our animal life has evolved. Astronomy gives us knowledge of how old the universe is, (13.8 billion years) and how it has been shaped and formed over this time. Geology teaches about the tectonic plates and what makes earthquakes happen, which incidently has nothing to do with homosexuality. As Christians who receive the gifts of the grace of God, our grace is enriched by knowledge of every kind.

It is therefore biblically unsound to deliberately ignore this knowledge and to decide to remain ignorant. Grace requires us to have an open mind, a learning mind, a discerning mind. Paul writes wanting an informed community of faith, to understand the Christian life based on knowledge and to enrich the grace given in Christ by knowledge of all kinds.

Paul goes in the next part of his chapter to talk about wisdom. In his letter he contrasts wisdom that is oratory, rhetorical, cleverness that leaves God out, and man-centred wisdom, he contrasts that with a wisdom focussed on the cross. Paul gives wisdom a new meaning in which Christ crucified becomes the personal figure of wisdom, as God’s agent in creation.

In

## 1 Corinthians 2:6-8

6Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Paul writes of a mature wisdom which is absent from the rulers of the age. There is a sense in which this is hidden because it is grasped or understood through the spirit. That is, we need to have an open mind, or an approach of grace. That does require we let go of trying to control everything. People who want to always be in control end up with closed minds. So Paul here is speaking of a wisdom built on:-

* knowledge of every kind, and grace centred, and
* the power of Christ centred on the spiritual life.

Now if we look at the Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, the wisdom literature is found in the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms. Proverbs 8 has a wisdom account of creation. Creation, providence and wisdom are the salient themes. Many Christian scholars, eg Karl Barth, have subordinated wisdom theology to salvation theology. Wisdom is not about salvation, except in the sense of save us from those who are ignorant and foolish.

So the Old Testament theology of salvation history and covenant is only one stream of theology that should stand alongside but not above wisdom. For the sages, divine election and providence cannot be limited to Israel’s election and history. The Sages speak of God in universal terms. The ground of moral authority is found in creation and wisdom. Yet wisdom is not a set of principles set in some abstract other world. It is found in the particular, in a context, in an event of history that comes we reflect about what went well and what went astray.

For Paul, God’s wisdom operates through sacrificial and self-giving love found in the life of Christ.

So wisdom develops in a context. As history and social thought changes, so does wisdom. I shall be looking at the Beautitudes in this theme of context, next time.

Let me conclude with this summary:

The opposite of wisdom is foolishness.

The opposite of knowledge is ignorance.

Wisdom is based on knowledge, and wisdom is greater than knowledge.

After all, a person may be knowledgable but foolish.

Wisdom requires judgement, and that judgement includes how to use our knowledge.

Wisdom opens us to be informed by knowledge of all kinds.

Those who deny informed knowledge are not just ignorant, but foolish.

For Paul, grace is open to and informed by knowledge,

and wisdom is a gift from God, known in Christ Jesus.

Later, I will argue that the Beautitudes are sayings or proverbs about how to be blessed or happy. I will explore the wisdom sayings in the Beautitudes and will connect this with well-being economics.

and ask:

In the context of climate change, and given our world seems heading down the path to serious climate change, is well-being economics up to the task?

And if not, can a wisdom theology play a part in guiding us through these times?

**Story: Koala and the coal**  March 2020

Koala sat in the leaves of the forest. Ecalypt leaves. Leaves as dry as a biblical manuscript. Parched.

In his front paws he held a piece of coal. While he looked at the coal, black and shining, a lump large enough to show in Parliament, his fingers blackened slightly with its dust.

“Hello Koala”. A voice hopped from behind a gum tree.

“Oh, hello Roo” said Koala.

“What have you got there?” enquired Roo.

“It’s a lump of coal. I found it under the ledge where the rocks layer like a sandwich. It must have fallen down.”

“Can you eat it?” asked Roo.

“I don’t believe so”, said Koala. “I guess over a few years it would become black sand, and I don’t like eating sand.”

“So what are you going to do with it?” Roo asked rather ruefully, testing whether Koala could bear to let it out of his bare paws.

“I think I will sell it,” said Koala.

“Sell it!” exclaimed Roo in such a loud voice it woke Snake.

“Yes” said Koala.

An encouraging ”Hiss” snaked into the conversation.

“I believe there is a good market for such essentials in the market economy” said Snake. “You would fetch a good price”.

Roo at this point began hopping around like a flapping galah.

“Are you crazy?” His question boomaranged around the bush.

“When you burn coal carbon is released, and you heat the air, which heats the land, which heats the trees, and when trees heat up they cook, like a sacrificial lamb on a barbeque.

“Oh don’t be silly” said Koala, who didn’t like this association between cooked mutton and coke-a-koala.

“We always have fires in our forests. And we are a big continent.”

Snake at this point snaked off and put his head in the sand.

“I wonder what will need to happen to make Koala change his mind? Roo pondered, and he hopped off to warn his Kanga friends.

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