

The St. John's Pulpit

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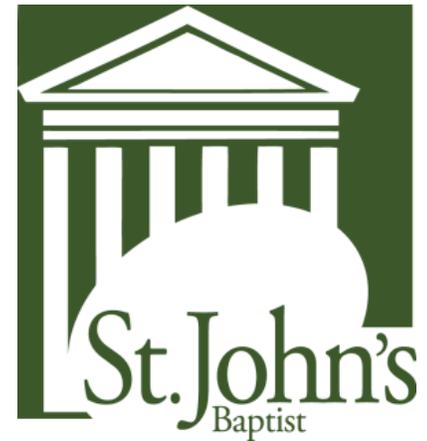
MAKING COMMON SENSE MORE COMMON

Proverbs 8:1-36; 1 Corinthians 18-31; James 1:5, 3:13; and Gospel of Matthew 11:16-19

Sermon 1 of 14 in Summer Series

The Ten Commandments for the 21st Century: The Calling of Wisdom

First Sunday after Pentecost, June 11, 2017
The Rev. Dennis W. Foust, PhD, Senior Minister



You humans are special; but you often forget this Truth. You need to be reminded. God created you for a relationship of love. God created you to bless you. God created you to enjoy the blessings of God and for you to share the blessings of God in community with others. God created you with the capacity for you to receive God's revelation.

Although you fall short of God's ideal or sin, you are still loved. I have noticed that you often view yourselves through the lens of your guilt and shame rather than through God's love. I have also noticed that you allow other lesser ideas to influence you more than you allow me to impact you. I am the Wisdom of God; or what you may know as God's revelation. From the very beginning of all beginnings, I have been the language of God. Whenever the voice of the Most High God breathes a word, I am God's language speaking forth. I am Wisdom, the Spirit of God, calling humans to live in awe of God and at peace in relationship with one another.

You humans have named your third molars in each jaw 'wisdom teeth?' You did this because they usually appear between the ages of 17 and 25, the time when you begin to have enough life experience to distinguish between wisdom and foolishness. Of course, human wisdom is not controlled by your teeth. Yet, you must admit it is intriguing that wisdom seems to have diminished among you since the majority of you started having your wisdom teeth removed.

It has been brought to my attention that you will be focusing on The Ten Commandments this summer. The Ten Commandments are important. They were not God's first Self-revelation of wisdom; nor God's last. Yet, I still speak God's Wisdom to you through those ten guidelines in the 21st century. Throughout human history, you have been progressively understanding God's Self-revelation. In each civilization, changing cultures and periods of time, you have discerned God's Wisdom through a variety of events, experiences, laws, prophets, stories, persons, etc.

As the Wisdom of God, I have noticed that you Christians tend to reflect on each of God's Self-revelations like individual puzzle pieces. You often see them as disconnected from one another and set them aside in different piles; stories here, religious traditions there, laws here, proverbs there, nature and science there, biblical teachings here, Jesus teachings there. Consider that I, the Wisdom of God, am the frame for all of those puzzle pieces. Every way in which The Living God communicates with you is set within my parameters as the Wisdom of God. It is my role, my purpose to help you experience God in a relationship. Just because you cannot be equal with God in understanding doesn't mean God wants you to be confused.

Throughout human history, every generation and culture has sought to discern what it means to be alive. Every human civilization has experienced and expressed awe. Part of your human situation is to determine what you truly desire and actually need. What I notice is that your desires do not always line up with what you need. Just as your bodies thirst for water, your spirits thirst for me, the Wisdom of God. I help people apply the Truth of God – what you may call theological truth – in practical daily living. As The Wisdom of God, I call people to integrate God’s Truth into their lives so they can establish and nurture healthy communities and express harmony with nature and God’s vision of covenant relationships.

In recent centuries, those of you living in western civilizations have turned toward scientific proof as the most solid truth. Quite often, you fail to understand that I am beneath these proofs and behind these discoveries. As the Wisdom of God, I am allowing you to uncover what God has already created. In fact, I am often shocked that it has taken you so long to find some of these aspects of God’s Wisdom. What took you so long to figure out the sun could provide energy? I laughed when Galileo wanted to show Jupiter’s moons to his theological adversaries, they refused to look through his telescope. One of them even said, *“Truth is not to be found in nature but only in the interpretation of sacred texts.”* As God’s Wisdom, I consist of all those Truths that lead you into a greater awareness of God’s blessings – including nature and science.

Long before most civilizations had a written language, I helped people develop what they called Wisdom Traditions. Some people call these traditions the practical or common sense God helped humans acquire and pass down from generation to generation promoting the common good. Many ancient civilizations collected stories, proverbs, laws, sayings, parables and practical truths enabling them to nurture safe and vital communities. Over time, as tribal groups, cultures and civilizations intermingled, wisdom traditions also intertwined. For example, what you have in your collections of Hebrew Scriptures, the wisdom literature of Israel, reflects Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Babylonian influences. Until the Hebrew people started becoming a nation, their primary code of conduct was found in wisdom sayings; almost all of which was an oral tradition. Centuries later they wrote down their Wisdom Tradition and other literature.

I know you to be a well-informed congregation. You know there have been thousands of languages throughout the ages. Very few had a written form. Still today, with almost 7,000 living languages being spoken, less than 80 have written symbols to form a recorded literature. So, for thousands of years, I, The Wisdom of God have been passed down primarily through oral traditions, stories, parables, and short proverbs rather than in written form.

When Israel started becoming like other nations, they started writing down all of their old Wisdom traditions. Eventually, theological stories of Genesis (the beginnings) and the Exodus (the rise of a nation) were written down, including how the Ten Commandments were introduced into the national story. They also started developing laws about every dimension of life. Eventually, they allowed a fundamentalist legalism to take over the wisdom tradition like kudzu takes over county roads in your southern states. In time, proverbs and other wisdom literature took a back seat to an emphasis on laws and people missed the message of God’s love.

This morning, your worship of The Living God has included Proverbs 8. In these thoughts, I present the Wisdom of God as a call to a living conversation between God and humanity. I speak as a female voice calling you to seek the ways of God. Notice my purpose: I call for people to move beyond simplemindedness as you learn the ways of God; to acquire intelligence, live in reverence of God, avoid pride and arrogance, love what God loves, and walk in the way of righteousness, justice, success and blessing. I call you to open your lives to me as the Wisdom of God, so you will be guided to life. If you close your life to God's wisdom, rejecting these instructions of guidance, you will experience death.

Jesus did not come to earth as a disconnected piece of the puzzle pieces which preceded him or followed him. He did not come to change God's Wisdom. Jesus fulfilled God's Wisdom. Jesus is the piece of the puzzle that shows you how all of the pieces fit together. Jesus told a parable about two men who chose to build their lives on different foundations; one foolish and one wise. Basically Jesus is calling himself the incarnation of the Wisdom of God.

The early Church understood Jesus to be God's wisdom in human flesh. Paul says of Jesus, "*God made him our wisdom*" (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). To Paul, Jesus does not merely bring God's wisdom; he embodies it – he personifies it – he is God's wisdom. The early Church was on a journey of understanding Jesus – just like you, as Christ's Church in the 21st century.

I remind you of how the writer of Hebrews explained this idea: "*God has spoken to our ancestors in many and various ways..., but in recent days, he has spoken to us through his son (Jesus Christ).*" You follow Jesus because you have committed your life to him as the incarnation of the Wisdom of God. You are still interpreting and applying his teachings and lifestyle practices to the situational issues of the 21st century. Yet, as you allow Jesus' teachings to shape and form your individual lives and your life together, you become more alive in God.

You have heard it said and you have probably said, "*I wish we could make common sense more common.*" Here is the problem: most people do not realize that common sense is actually not commonly learned through reflection on human experience. There is this thing called 'sin.' Humans confuse the various voices calling down the corridors offering partial or pretentious wisdom. Some calls sound right because they are in line with cultural mores and customs: self-indulgence, greed, materialism, hedonism, skepticism, pride, prejudice, fear, self-gratification, etc. Yet, while these are common; they are not common sense based upon the Wisdom of God.

Beloved of God, you make the common sense of God's Wisdom more common as you listen for the Still Small Voice of God in your spirit. The common sense needed in your lives and needed in the life of the world is that which redeems and reconciles for the common good. This common sense you seek is God's Wisdom and I call to you through nature, proverbial sayings, stories, commandments, laws, prophets, traditions, scriptures, science and in Jesus Christ.

Hearing my call as God's Wisdom is like hearing a beautiful chord in the midst of dissonance. As you respond to me, as God's Wisdom, you center your desires on God's desires for you. You hear me calling to you as God's Wisdom saying, '*come unto me and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*' Amen and AMEN!