

Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Wisdom: an attitude towards life”

Into the world fell a truth that broke into two on its way down. So begins the Children’s story *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*.¹ One day a human found one portion of the broken truth which said “You Are Loved.” He kept the broken truth. It felt like it was for him alone. He was happy and proud. In fact, he clung to the broken truth so tightly that he never questioned it or searched for a match to the jagged edge which showed it was truly broken. Eventually, he shared his broken truth with people who lived with him and it became their most important possession. Over time they forgot that there were other ways of discerning small truths as well, such as listening to one another and opening their eyes to nature. They began to call the broken truth “The Truth.”

Then, they started to feel angry and fearful towards other people that did not share their truth. With time the other people said “We must have this Great Truth for ourselves, for with it comes happiness and power.” It was war, war, war. Everyone wanted the broken truth, to possess the words “You Are Loved.” The broken truth went back and forth, and back and forth in war. No one ever doubted it was the truth—though everyone was suffering.

Then a Little Girl went to find Old Turtle. She set off across the world and became fascinated by she saw and by Old Turtle when she finally met him. She asked Old Turtle: Has it always been this way? Could suffering end? “Can it change, Old Turtle? Can we make it change?”

Old Turtle told her that the world had been different before the people became enamored with the broken truth. Old Turtle said, “It is because it is so close to a great, whole truth that it has such beauty, and that the people love it so. It is the lost portion of that broken truth that the people need, if the world is to be made whole again.” The Little Girl decided to follow Old Turtle’s guidance to seek the lost portion of the broken truth. She tried to remember other truths she had experienced besides “You Are Loved.”

The Little Girl remembered her journey and the wonderful things she had seen and she realized she had been made for the world and the world for her. The world was loved too! Old Turtle told her “The broken truth, and life itself, will be mended only when one person meets another who is very different...and sees and hears...herself.”

The Little Girl saw in her heart people different from her own, but still somehow, “The People”. Old Turtle said go home and share what you have learned about the world and other people, “Take this with you.” He placed something bright in her hand. She cherished the bright stone she carried back.

She finally reached her home, “But it had been a long journey, and those who take great journeys of the heart are changed. The people did not recognize her.” She told them “The Truth” was the Broken Truth and it needed to be made whole. They didn’t get it. So

the Little Girl climbed up the high place where the Broken Truth was kept. She took out her stone and added the missing piece to the old, broken one. It now read, “You are loved; and so are they.”

“The people looked. And looked. And looked. Some frowned. Some smiled. Some even laughed. And some cried. And they began to understand.” They understood that they stopped searching for the whole truth and had clung instead to a destructive chard of the fullness of life offered to them.

One of the things that struck me in this story is that the Little Girl went seeking wisdom during a time of turmoil. She sought another way in the midst of conflict, prejudice and strife. We aren’t told much about her personal life but if she grew up in the middle of many wars, she must have been shaped by the rhetoric of hate all around her. Yet she chose to believe, to seek and yearn for the whole truth—for knowledge that had the power to change the world starting with her own heart.

“My life is a listening, God’s is a speaking,” Thomas Merton wrote in *Thoughts in Solitude*.ⁱⁱ We, like the Little Girl, are to be on a journey of seeking truth because God is still speaking to us through the Spirit. Wisdom for the Christian is found in discerning the mind of God over time. Our journey takes us deeper into not only the scriptures for guidance, but into a growing, evolving relationship with the living, moving God. If our relationship with God has not evolved or changed, if our views on theology and life are the same as they were when we were 18 and we are now 50, there is a good chance we have not been listening to God call these past 32 years.

In the scriptures we encounter wisdom in moral theology or ethics, wise sayings, practical advice and commandments. The wisdom tradition prods us farther than following commands though. Another branch emphasizes that wisdom is discerning the will of God. In our Ephesians text seeking God’s wisdom is contrasted with following our own desires. Do not be foolish, the writer tells us, but understand what the will of the Lord is! Live as the wise do—be filled with the Spirit instead of things that cause a stupor. “...[We] are cautioned not to wander aimlessly through life’s maze or become victims of a moral stupor. Rather, wisdom’s call is to leave folly and to follow the path of sobriety..., based on a conscious effort to discover the divine mind.”ⁱⁱⁱ We are never too young or never too old to deepen the way we listen for God through prayer, discernment and the reading of the scriptures. It is our call to continually deepen our life of faith so we can witness to the Spirit’s movement in new ways in the world.

In *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* the Little Girl knew there was something more to life than what she had been told by her people. Something was out there that could bring peace. Our story of the good news, of the whole truth, deviates from the Little Girl’s story at this point. The Way, the Truth and the Life has been revealed, and we have been given the peace of Jesus Christ as a gift already. Discerning its impact on our lives and following Christ’s radical call to live in the knowledge of the peace of God seems to be what we stumble and falter on. Instead of allowing room for different expressions of wisdom, we want to narrow the mysteries of God down to what is comfortable for me, what I think the truth is.

The historic principles of the Presbyterian Church are built on the sovereignty of God and the belief God is at work in one another. This is why we declare, “God alone is Lord of the conscience.” Although we are tied together by Reformed theology and our polity, we leave room for theological dissention. The southern Presbyterian church has a

long history of letting its candidates for ordination declare a “scruple” or “scruples” that deviate from the majority but aren’t essential tenets of a profession of faith. The attitude with which we approach our work and life together either stifles or encourages the Spirit’s movement within or midst. Will we have an attitude toward life, honoring God’s love for us and for “them” too?

Like the Little Girl we are to look with awe at the world and seek the Truth that will help the world to live in peace. Biblical wisdom, you see, is an attitude toward life—not death. The beginning of wisdom is the worship and adoration of God, what we do here and in our daily lives. Wisdom begins with knowledge of God and then it must broaden to engage other truths God has enabled us to discover in the world. We seek to comprehend the deep things of God in all situations and contexts. Otherwise we are like the humans in the story who clung so tightly to one sentence of truth that they forgot the truth was revealed all around them as well.

Each week we gather to give thanks for what God has revealed to us in our various lives, professions, schools, families, friendships and travels. “The hymns we sing in church praise a...love which is never fickle, which never fails, and which is totally unselfish. The overwhelming expression of God’s love which saves us now and eternally.” Wisdom is “that outlook which enables the believer to face life, to make sense of its enigmas, and to surmount its problems.”^{iv} Let us together give “thanks to God...at all times and for everything.” Amen.

ⁱ Douglas Wood, *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* (Scholastic Press: NY, 2003), direct quotes and paraphrasing.

ⁱⁱ John Dear, *Living Peace* (Image Books Doubleday: NY, 2001)33.

ⁱⁱⁱ 63.

^{iv} *Reconciled in Christ: Ministry in Light of Ephesians*, Wendell W. Frerichs, *Word & World Texts in Context*, Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, 1988.