

A Little Wisdom; A Lot of Wisdom

January 4, 2026

Jeremiah 31:7-14

John 1:1-18

It's still Christmas. It really is twelve days long in the Church calendar, and we're on day eleven, so you can thank your lucky stars that you're not likely to receive eleven pipers piping or eleven missionaries today. On this eleventh day of Christmas, if we're thinking about the Holy Family, we're probably thinking about the mixed joy and fear of Jesus' parents, still trying to figure out what their newborn would need next.

The Revised Common Lectionary wants us to turn our attention elsewhere. As Cody J. Sanders writes at Working Preacher, "The prologue of John's Gospel cracks the lens with which we are tempted to engage in any too-small reading of the Gospel by directing our attention toward a cosmic space-time reality. Unlike the Lukan narrative that often shapes our imaginations in the Christmas season, the Second Sunday of Christmas plunges us into the deep time of the primordial Genesis creation narratives with John's opening words: 'In the beginning...'"

You've probably caught the reference John made to the beginning of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." (Genesis 1:1) You may not have caught the other parallels John made with other classic texts, particularly those from Jewish Wisdom literature like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. As Jaime Clark-Soules writes at Working Preacher, "John brilliantly presents Jesus in the role of Lady Wisdom in a number of ways. As we read in numerous LXX texts, Lady Wisdom (hokhmah in Hebrew, Sophia in Greek) is God's partner: she helps to create the world, she delights in the human race, she continually tries to help humans to get knowledge and flee from ignorance. She cries aloud incessantly. Unfortunately, the Old Testament tells us that she is often rejected because fools hate knowledge and humans would rather wallow in ignorance, for the most part."

As I mentioned in this morning's children's time, wisdom and knowledge aren't the same thing, but... acting in ignorance, deliberately choosing ignorance, is definitely not wise.

In contrast, wrote John, Jesus, God's Messiah, embodied the ancient concept of Wisdom: knowledgeable, just, generous, righteous, thoughtful, faithful, peaceful.

These had been the virtues encouraged by Judaism: written in wisdom literature, declared by the prophets, required in the Law, and celebrated in the Psalms.

Those are the virtues exhibited by Jesus.

A little wisdom had become a lot of wisdom.

It's a wisdom that's not just of the intellect. "The Word became flesh and lived among us" – the word "lived" can be translated as "pitched a tent." "Pitching tent," writes Karyn Wiseman at Working Preacher, "means coming to be fully part of the world in which you live and minister. The Word in this text is doing just that — coming to 'pitch tent' with humanity. The Word made flesh comes to be in the world and to change the world." Dr. Clark-Soles writes that John is "a very touchy-feely Gospel... John wants us to understand that the same intimacy shared by God and Jesus is shared with us and Jesus/God. Hence, the Incarnation."

"Moreover," writes Karoline Lewis at Working Preacher, "in the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, now God not only goes where God's people go, but is who they are. That is, God now dwells with us by taking on our form, our humanity. This 'different' dwelling of God is God being where God's people are, and now who God's people are."

A little bit of wisdom has become a whole lot of presence, God's presence, with us, with everyone, with all the world.

The wisdom Jesus embodied is the wisdom Jesus lived. He brought compassion and forgiveness to people who'd been told they deserved no forgiveness and would receive no compassion. He rejected the options of servile acceptance of tyranny and of violent upheaval against tyranny. He encouraged rigorous personal ethics and a community ethic of mutual care and support. He refused to accept the casual practices that had enriched moneychangers around the Temple at the expense of faithful people. When they came to arrest him, he did not meet violence with violence.

Jesus set us the challenge of living that same wisdom, and it is a challenge. It's a high bar. It's a wisdom that may call us to put others' interests over our own. It's a wisdom that looks foolish when it leads to a cross.

It's a wisdom that leads to resurrection.

The foolishness of the world leads to suffering, dissension, and death.

I really wish people wouldn't hand me perfect sermon illustrations on Saturday, but some people have a talent for it. The headline of yesterday's editorial from the New York *Times* Editorial Board was, "Donald Trump's Attack on Venezuela Is Illegal and Unwise." They concluded with these words:

"We will hold out hope that the current crisis will end less badly than we expect. We fear that the result of Mr. Trump's adventurism is increased suffering for Venezuelans, rising regional instability and lasting damage for America's interests around the world. We know that Mr. Trump's warmongering violates the law."

This is the kind of leadership that Jesus simply rejected. He wouldn't do it himself. He wouldn't bow to those who tried to govern him that way. Let's be clear: it got him crucified. Nothing they did could force him to change his ways. Nothing they did could prevent his resurrection.

Fortunately there are examples of people following Jesus' wisdom in the world.

Melissa Bane Sevier writes in her blog: "Yes, there are people who do really bad things in this world. But there are also moments when we can point to some person or act and think: There. There it is. That's how we see eternity right here.

"Maybe it's some random act of kindness. Or the face of your most precious loved one. Some deep goodness you see in a person you know or a stranger.

"We have each other. The Word is made flesh anew each day, right here among us.

"And we glimpse grace and truth."

Glimpse grace and truth in those around you. Let others glimpse Christ in you.

Amen.

by Eric Anderson