

April 15, 2018 Wisdom Redefined Psalm 107

One of the constant companions at my desk in my study at 24 Sherwood Cres. In Belleville, is my copy of the Concise Oxford Dictionary. I consult it regularly enough that I always know where it is. In fact it is usually not on my desk. It is usually on the floor, wedged between the end of the desk and the wall. And when the debris gets deep, I still always know under which papers, which books it is located. The Oxford Dictionary is my comfort blanket when it comes to writing or preparing for worship.

Why I like the Oxford Dictionary is this: it is not a theological book. It is about words in our language, and what they mean. It is a tool of precision, not unlike a table saw. And frankly I am impressed when the Oxford defines a word by referencing the Bible or the Church, or the Christian faith and creeds. That's not what I went looking for when I looked up the word wisdom. I wanted an unbiased (I hate to use this word but it applies) a scientific definition of what wisdom is perceived to be by the English speaking world.

Wisdom: being wise. Now there is a problem with that definition unless you want to look up the word wise. But I read on. "Possession of experience and knowledge together with the power to apply them critically or practically. Sagacity, prudence, common sense." Then it starts to branch out. "Wise sayings...the wisdom of Solomon, the wisdom of Jesus...Wisdom literature: books of philosophical reflection in ancient Babylon

or Egypt.” I’m thinking ohhh...sounds like stuff in the Old Testament to me, and then paydirt. Biblical books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the epistle of James (that’s New Testament)!..then it says “tooth: hindmost molar usually cut at about 20 years.” What an interesting bundle of facts.

Taking the last one first...the one about the wisdom tooth. It makes the point that wisdom is not child’s play. There are always exceptions...like the experience of 11 year old Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem, listening and asking questions and making an impression because of his wisdom, and his grasp of Biblical/Old Testament issues. But the point is the reason they call it a wisdom tooth is because it usually arrives after or as we become adults. Age and experience are involved in being wise, in having wisdom. Though it should never be assumed that these guarantee wisdom...after all we are talking about people! A 71 year old President can be....no I should not get into that!

But certain books of the Bible are literally classified as wisdom literature. I was disappointed that the Book of Psalms did not make the Oxford’s short list although Proverbs is right next to the Psalms in the Bible and maybe close counts here. “Possession of experience and knowledge together, with the power to apply them (experience and knowledge) critically, or practically. You see wisdom has to do with real life. And real life needs. Tools to get through some of the rough patches of life, tools to get through some of the good patches so that you do not wind up colliding with a wall, or running off the road.

Psalm 107 begins by giving us advice, making a statement and claim, and sharing with us the sum of life's lessons.

The piece of advice with which Psalm 107 opens is this. "Give thanks to the Lord." Our nation has been swept into a corporate experience of grief as a result of the Humboldt tragedy. And one might indeed be tempted to ask, what is there to be thankful for? And since we are on the subject of the Lord, why did HE not rescue those who were consumed by the accident that brought a bus and transport truck into collision on a Saskatchewan highway? You have to allow the question to be heard...if there is to be anything like a "wise and faithful answer" offered to it.

For one thing, there is a reason we call these kinds of occurrences accidents. Humboldt happened. When the dust settles and the work has been done here is what is going to come to light. The accident was a result of human error, human limitation, and human sin. I do not mean in any of those details to apportion blame to an individual. We make mistakes. We are not all seeing creatures nor do we have the power to prevent our making of mistakes. Stuff happens. And sin, the Biblical concept of sin is still the best word I can find for the inconsistencies revealed by what people do. Law abiding, community minded, family people run red lights and stop signs when they are in a rush or thinking of several things at once. It

is foolishness to blame the Sovereign God, for the mistakes and inconsistencies of human behaviour.

And as for the advice... "Give thanks to the Lord" have you seen the pictures what remains of those two vehicles? Thanks be to God the death toll was not higher. Thanks be to God that the driver of the truck survived. Thanks be to God for the outpouring of love and concern that has swept over Canada for families in grief, and the broken bodies of surviving young people and adults. Thanks be to God for the first responders and those who raced to a disaster sight to save lives and offer encouragement to those who were in mortal danger. That is the advice of Psalm 107. Wise. Wise.

The statement and claim of Psalm 107 is this: "the Lord, HE is good." This Psalm lists disasters that beset the Hebrew who became the Jewish people and the Jewish state of Israel. Part of what the writer of the Psalm,... we have at least as much reason for claiming that was David the King of Israel, as we have for pursuing some other option.... part of what David tells us is that the Hebrews became the Jewish people and the nation of Israel, not in spite of their hardships, but because God is good and rescued them in every circumstance where they needed a Saviour. Because God is good. One of Jesus critics tried to butter him up, before he criticized what Jesus had done and said by saying "we know you are good!" Jesus cut that critic off at the knees saying, "No one is good except God." Here is the implication of what Jesus said. Are

you equating me with God? Or are you dismissing the goodness of God who has consistently saved us from our sinfulness, and the troubles brought on by our waywardness? The claim of the Psalm is unrelenting and unapologetic. "The Lord, HE is good." It is careless....to say otherwise.

A piece of advice. A claim. And the sum of life's lessons from experience. "His love, (the love of the Lord), endures forever." David says, that's how we got out of Egypt in the first place. It was an act of God's love. That's how we found our way out of the wilderness, God's enduring love. That's how we escaped the darkness that imprisoned us in Babylon and Egypt. "He broke away their chains!....Let them give thanks to the Lord for HIS unfailing love." (vs. 15) In all the things that you heard about the Humboldt Broncos tragedy, I hope you heard this. Last Sunday the United Church in Humboldt Saskatchewan had to find a substitute Sunday School Teacher. One of the young men who died in the crash taught a Sunday School class. That made the evening news several times and on several networks. Wonders never cease.

Finally, Psalm 107 ends with the verse which is the text for this message. Verse 43... "Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord." Which throws us back to verse 1 and the balance of the Psalm. "Give thanks to the Lord, for HE is good, and HIS love endures forever."