

# “Remembering God, is Wise?”

(Based on Psalm 111)

The beginning of wisdom...how might you have answered this question? I looked up some thoughts on this question. Some of the answers were:

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.” ~ Confucius

“Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice.” ~ Anton Chekhov

“The older I grow the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom.” ~ H. L. Mencken

“In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.” ~ John Muir

These quotes use words like reflection, practice, imitation, walking in nature, experience and the suggestion that age alone doesn't teach us wisdom.

Wisdom seems to be something we learn, something we discover, something that is revealed. Wisdom is lived. Wisdom is not a reward for just passing through life. Wisdom may be found in more than just one way. And it appears wisdom may not be found at all.

Wisdom is something that the psalmist is inviting us to embrace today.

“Alleluia! Reverence for Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom – And those who have it, prove themselves wise.”

The psalmist is inviting us to find and seek wisdom through our openness to God, our reverence for Yahweh. Reverence is not a word we explore very much. Its meaning shares, “Reverence is an honor and respect that is deeply felt and outwardly demonstrated.” “Reverence is deep respect for someone or something.” Respect – a listening to, a caring towards, staying open and available to.

We could say that the beginning of wisdom is leaving space for God, showing the Holy respect, listening for, caring after God's hopes, heart and thoughts. Wisdom includes letting God into our lives.

Why take so much time spelling out what reverence is, what respect looks like, breaking it down because if you are like me, I sometimes forget to make space for God. How can I know God's wisdom, or live God's wisdom if I don't make room for God to be revealed or to show up?

Don Postema in his book of the same name, “Space for God” shares an excerpt from the play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. Emily has died, but she is given one day more to live with her family and those she loved. She offers, “We don't have time to look at one another. (sobbing) I didn't realize. So, all that was going on and we never noticed... Do any human being ever realize life while they live it – every, every minute?” The stage manager offers in response, “No. (pause) The saints and poets, maybe – they do some.” P. 14 *Space for God* by Don Postema

We miss seeing life. We don't allow life to greet us often. Even the saints and poets only get a sometimes. So, no wonder the psalmist is inviting us to show praise. To listen for what God has done in the past. To consider the promises God has made for the future. The psalmist is inviting us to open our eyes and our lives to God out there and in here.

“Great are your works, to be pondered by all who love them. Majestic and glorious are your works, And your justice stands firm forever. You make us remember your wonders – You are compassion and love. You give food to those who revere you, Keeping your Covenant ever in mind.”

The psalmist is sharing what Don Postema is encouraging -- to find ways to let God greet us, wash over us, surprise us, comfort us, bless us.

In our live together at Dublin we have a variety of ways in which we try to make space for us – our prayers on Sunday, our opportunities to walk in creation with the leadership of Mary Savage invites us to open our eyes, ears and spirit to the Spirit's calling during Forest Church, the contemplation groups led by John Buttars and Colleen Lowrie helping us engage readings, or scripture using reflection, questions, insights of others. We realize that God has things to show us, help us hear, wonders to behold.

One of those moments of awe and reverence came during the summer of 1986. I was doing a summer internship placement in Manitoba. There wasn't much time off, but we were given three days. So, I called my friend Mark who was serving in Biggar, Saskatchewan and asked if he wanted to go and see the mountains. I wasn't sure I would ever be this close again. He was open to the adventure and off we went. Thankfully, one of our church member's daughter had an apartment in Calgary where we could crash. Then the next day we headed off into the mountains – Banff in the morning and Lake Louise in the afternoon. Lake Louise had always been a special spot in my family as that was the place where my parents honeymooned. I was always curious about it. I still remember that summer day making our way across the parking lot and there was this powerful cooling presence leading us towards some evergreen trees. As the cooling wind led me, I walked through the trees to be greeted by a wind wall of refreshment and a sparkling lake with diamonds of sunlight in every direction. In that moment I felt awe. I felt God had greeted me and said welcome to this place of my presence. I was overwhelmed in its beauty, and I felt embraced by something bigger than me and something beyond my words to describe. I didn't drop to my knees, but I could have. It was holy moment. An affirmation of the world as something grander than I sometimes gave the world credit to show.

God opened up my small box and revealed more.

I believe this is what the psalmist is inviting us to experience with his Alleluia, his words of look around you, with his instruction to let awe and reverence be part of our living. As we begin to discover God is near and God is grand, we are more open to hear the wisdom of God's ways in our living.

“Alleluia! Reverence for Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom – And those who have it, prove themselves wise.”

Where has awe and reverence met you? Was it in the Bald eagle sighting as you walked a trail? Was in the thundering sounds of water pouring down the hillside creating a waterfall in the process? Was it a double rainbow after a storm or the dancing of Northern lights on a winter's evening? Perhaps it was watching the heron at the waters' edge or the graceful swan guiding peacefully by? Maybe it was a quiet moment in church where peace was felt. Or an ancient promise that greeted you in your time of distress that reminded you that God would see you through this time.

When we make room for God to show us, when we take time to listen after God's heart and thoughts, when we create space for God, wisdom has a way of moving into our lives.

The psalmist thought we should know this. I am glad he took the time to write it down.

“Alleluia! Reverence for Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom.” May it be so for you too.

*Sermon written by Rev. Bruce Dickson and delivered at Dublin Street United Church, Guelph, ON January 28, 2024. Permission is given for personal use or group study.*