

January 29, 2023
Fourth after Epiphany

Meditation: “Wisdumb”

Early this past week as I was reading the scriptures for today I heard the news of yet another mass shooting in the US. I also heard the expected remarks that guns are not the problem, that, indeed, guns are the solution to these mass shootings. If more people had guns, there wouldn't be so many shootings. They argue that guns don't kill people, people kill people. I think I see a solution here – keep the guns, get rid of all the people. What ever happened to “Thou shalt not kill?” What ever happened to “do unto others as you would have done unto you?” What ever happened to “Love your neighbour as yourself?”

Closer to home, I heard more on the Ford government's solution to years of neglect and underfunding of the provincial health care system. Instead of providing more funding to train and hire and retain more doctors and more nurses, we should give the money to private for-profit clinics to bail out the publicly funded system.

Or to solve the housing crisis, we should allow developers to build McMansions on the land that purifies our drinking water and provides habitat for other forms of life; McMansions that the average worker cannot afford to buy; McMansions that municipal taxpayers will be on the hook for subsidizing by paying for the infrastructure that development fees would have paid for.

And don't even get me started on AI writing essays for students.

These are examples of the wisdom (or what passes for wisdom) of the world. And when I re-read the scripture passages, I noticed two things. The first is that the gospel lesson is part of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, which we all know well, and I have preached on for two decades. The epistle, however, was from Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. We just heard it. In it, Paul talks about how different God's wisdom is from the wisdom of the world; how God's wisdom makes human wisdom look like sheer and utter foolishness. Given the examples from the news this week, I think Paul is on to something, at least I hope that God is smarter than we appear to be.

Examples of worldly wisdom – might makes right (anybody think Putin is right?), “I'm all right, Jack, keep your hands off my stack.” (wealth is status),

Examples of God's wisdom – blessed are you when you are poor in spirit, when you mourn, if you are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (justice), if you are reviled and persecuted and falsely accused of doing evil. Wait. What? Anybody here ever been anxious or depressed? Did it feel like a blessing? How about mourning a loss, or being persecuted for working for what is right, or being reviled, or being falsely accused of doing evil? Blessed?

God takes everything that we think as a society and turns it on its head. Might makes right? It is not the powerful that God sees fit to bless, but the weak and the vulnerable.... In fact, God chose to enter time and space as a weak and vulnerable baby. In God's eyes, true strength is found in weakness and vulnerability. In God's eyes, true wealth is found in relationship, not in material wealth, and true status is found in giving all we have to help another, not in hoarding what we have.

Wisdom is more than just information. Wisdom is about the application of information. In God's eyes, wisdom is about how to live in harmony with one another and with the world around us, you know, God's creation, and every living thing and system God created. Wisdom is about relationships, about how to survive and how to thrive, and in the Bible, survival and prosperity are not about the individual, but about the community. Individuals don't thrive apart from the community, and community doesn't thrive without the individuals in the community.

In a way, wisdom is the same as blessing, because blessing is about relationship. Blessing depends on relationship, for in order to bless, there must be someone to issue the blessing and someone to receive the blessing. When we bless someone, we invest something of ourselves into the recipient of the blessing, and we cannot be the recipient of a blessing oblivious to the grace of the giver of the blessing. Blessing involves, presupposes relationship.

Could it be that blessing is wisdom?

Jesus calls us to be both as innocent as doves, and as wise as serpents. May you see through this world's wisdom, which seeks its own benefit, and live according to God's wisdom, which seeks blessing for all.