



God of Wisdom and Understanding, open us to all that you are doing in us so that we might live the lives you are calling us to. Amen

The story is told that a congregation was very excited about the new minister they called.

On the very first Sunday of the pastor's ministry, she preached a powerful sermon that was Biblically sound, theologically accurate, and was applicable to the congregation's everyday life. People in the pew nudged each other and said, "This is just who we need."

On the second Sunday, she once again stepped into the pulpit, preached a powerful sermon that was Biblically sound, theologically accurate, and applicable to the congregation's everyday life. In fact, it was the same sermon as the week before.

Though a little strange the congregation didn't mind too much. It was, after all, a very good sermon and each person remarked about the depth of Scripture and how they learned something new in the second hearing of the sermon.

On the third Sunday, the pastor walked to the pulpit, read the same passage and preached the same sermon, again!

While the congregation was confident that this person was the minister God had called to their church ... they grew a little concerned.

Finally, a few church members approached the M&P committee, "If she has the audacity to preach that sermon one more time – you'll need to have a talk with her!"

But sure enough, on the fourth Sunday, the pastor walked to the pulpit, read the same passage and preached the same sermon.

After the service the M&P Committee requested a few moments of the pastor's time.

"What can I do for you?" the new minister asked.

"Well" they said, "We are a bit concerned that you keep preaching the same sermon every Sunday. Our question is: Do you have another sermon?"

The preacher took off her glasses and replied "I do have another sermon. But the congregation hasn't started living the first one yet."

That's kind of how I feel about the assigned Isaiah readings for this season of Advent! The peaceable kingdom ... again?! I mean, I loved our turkey dinner last week but I don't want to eat it everyday for a month!

It's almost as if the wise ones who created this list of readings figured, we probably wouldn't get it the first time around, or the second, or third!!

And so, here we are again. With Isaiah's vision of a world filled with peace, hope, joy and love. We get it! We get that this is God's vision for our world and we continue to wait for its coming.

Like the congregation that learns something new each time the same sermon is preached, this vision becomes ingrained in our heads. Challenging us, week after week, year after year, to figure out the who, what, where, when, and how of it all.

What struck me in today's reading is how Isaiah's vision names a leader with, among other attributes, the spirit of wisdom and understanding. And it got me thinking.

Although it's not theologically sound, Christians have adopted these Isaiah texts as referring to the coming of Christ. Certainly, there are many aspects of this peaceable kingdom that reflect who we understand Jesus to be and the gospel writers harken back to these texts to defend their perspective of Jesus as the long-awaited messiah, but it's actually unlikely that Isaiah is referring to a Holy Messiah like Jesus.

That said, and theological conundrums aside, if we see Jesus' gifts, life and ministry reflected in these words and I think we do; and if we understand ourselves to be the hands and feet of Christ, which I hope we do, then I wonder what it means for us to have a spirit of wisdom and understanding, to walk in the way of wisdom and understanding.

A show of hands, how many of you think you have a spirit of wisdom and understanding?

How many of you think you are wise?

I was chatting with a woman last week who was curious about my call to ministry and my life leading up to it. I gave her a very brief synopsis and she stood with a look of admiration on her face. A look I didn't understand.

"You've done so much in your life!" she said "You must have so much wisdom and insight to share."

All the time I'm thinking. "well, it was a pretty ordinary life, nothing spectacular. I never climbed to the top of Machu Pichu, I haven't made millions from some great innovation, there is nothing remarkable about my life at all. So wisdom? I don't know"

It's actually been a bit of a sore spot with me, that I haven't had any "significant accomplishments" in my life. Although, I don't know why I think I should!

Perhaps you can identify with me on this. We live our lives tackling the challenges as they come, as best as we can, and carry on and we celebrate the little accomplishments, in little ways.

We assume that what we know, what we've learned in our lives is no different than anyone else. We are, after all, just normal, everyday folk...nothing special.

But let's think about this for a minute. Isaiah refers to this peaceable kingdom as one where new growth comes from dead stumps and the wild creatures are tamed.

What are the dying stumps you've witnessed and experience in your life?

What new growth came from them?

What new opportunities presented themselves because of the death of those old stumps?

What wild creatures have you faced in your life?

What wolves have clawed away at your comfort?

What leopards have chased you in vicious circles threatening to destroy your peace of mind?

How did you tame them? How did you learn to lie down with them, calm your fears enough to hold them, still your racing heart enough to let them hold you?

We've all done it, right? And through these experiences we have gained wisdom and understanding about life, people and the ways of the world.

Through the dying stumps of our lives, new life comes; new ways of being; new insights; new opportunities.

Which brings me to my next questions:

Do you recognize this wisdom that you carry? Do you share it with others?

How do you speak to your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren, about the life you have lived so far, the things that make you who you are, the ways in which you have learned to be caring, compassionate, accepting, understanding? How do you share your faith? How do you talk about God?

When I went into ministry, my then teenage daughters' friends would sometimes ask me a faith question, to which my younger daughter would quickly interrupt saying "Oh please! Don't get her started!" And we would laugh, and I would carry on in as brief a manner as possible!

After all, for some of these young people, I was the only person they knew who "did church". It was an opportunity to share my wisdom and understanding, although I didn't think of it in that way at the time.

As we age, we often think that we have less and less to offer to the world, our families, the church. We link value to physical capabilities.

So much emphasis in our society is put on staying young and vibrant. Wrinkle creams, hair dyes, face lifts and other body adjustments. It's as if aging is something to be avoided. Something to fear. Stay young, stay vibrant.

But what if the gift of aging is precisely the fact that we aren't as active, and thus we have more time to sit, reflect on and share our wisdom?

What if, instead of seeing ourselves as aging, we see ourselves as gaining in wisdom?

What if, instead of bemoaning the things we are no longer able to do, we engage fully in sharing the wisdom and understanding we have gained through our many life experiences; from letting old stumps die so that new life can come; from taming the wolves and the leopards of our lives, so that we can live peaceably with them, respecting them as they respect us?

What if this way of being, this walking the way of wisdom and understanding is precisely the gift of the Spirit we need today, to help lead us into this peaceable kingdom and here we sit, unable to recognize it flowing out of us?

What if we let the stump of aging die and the shoot of wisdom and understanding grow and bloom in us and in others?

What if?

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