

## Opening

- Are you familiar that axiom about common sense that says, “it’s not so common?”
  - It’s a reference to the reality that those things which conventional, worldly wisdom holds up as wise, often runs counter-intuitive to what is truly wise.
  - Or to put it another way, it’s a way of acknowledging an individual’s need to “choose wisely” in the pursuits of life.
  - That idea, is what we’re dealing with in today’s scripture readings.
- In our reading from 1 Kings, God comes to Solomon in a dream and asks him, “What I should give you?”
  - And Solomon’s response would fall into the “**not-so-common**” category.
  - King David had ruled over Israel for 40 years and has now passed away
    - His son Solomon has ascended to the throne.
    - Solomon loves God and honors his father, by living a life in accordance with the established order as taught to him, by his now deceased father.
    - Solomon has traveled to Gibeon to offer sacrifices to God and while there, God comes to Solomon in a dream and makes him an offer
    - "Ask what I should give you", God says to Solomon.
  - What a mind-blowing offer, right? God is saying to Solomon "whatever you ask for, is yours".
    - Put yourself in Solomon's shoes for a moment. If God had made you such an offer, what you would ask for?
    - As the son of the most famous King in the history of Israel, conventional wisdom might suggest Solomon ask for his share of glory, riches and power.
    - But Solomon doesn't ask for any of that. Instead, Solomon praises God's faithfulness to his father and he describes his own circumstances- that of being a young man in need of wisdom.
    - His father’s death has thrust Solomon into a position where he must govern a large nation of people; and not just any people, but a nation of God's chosen people.

- And he's only 19 or 20 years old- in his own words, he is "a little child"
- Uncharacteristically for someone his age, Solomon realizes the enormity of his responsibility and so he doesn't ask for material gifts, but instead, asks for gifts which will benefit the people whom he is to lead.
- Solomon asks God for an understanding mind in order to make him a good judge- for the ability to discern between that which is good and evil.

### **God Gives Solomon Wisdom**

- God is pleased with Solomon's choice and God says to Solomon "I will give you a wise and discerning mind. When it comes to wisdom, no one shall compare to you. I will also give to you what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you."
  - Solomon's response to God was just about perfect, don't you think?
    - Solomon understands God's power and might
    - He knows God has the ability to grant him anything
    - Why not ask for riches? What's wrong with getting a little bit of the good life? Nothing wrong with being popular, is there?
  - Indeed, in his request of God, Solomon shows his "not-so-common" sense- he asks for wisdom.

### **The Psalm**

- When we read Psalm 111 today, it reflects wisdom that is not-so-common anymore.
  - This Psalm, like many of the psalms, speaks of God's power and might.
  - It says things like "Great are the works of the LORD"
    - "His righteousness endures forever."
    - "He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds"
    - "He has shown his people the power of his works"
- As we ponder these verses, against the conventional wisdom of our times, we might wonder how many people today really think of God as powerful and mighty.
  - And I wonder how many of us today even think about the power and might of God at all.
  - We live in the midst of a world that we say God created and we are surrounded by the wonder of all of God's mighty works.

- We see the evidence of God’s wonderful deeds in the miracle of birth.
  - And in healing that comes in God’s name.
  - We personally experience God’s grace and mercy every day of our lives.
  - And yet, I wonder- <PAUSE> - are we so overwhelmed by the power and might of what **WE HAVE CREATED**- that we no longer appreciate the power and might of what **GOD HAS CREATED**?
- And then, in verse 10 of the Psalm, we find a peculiar statement that says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.”
  - What does it mean to “fear” God?
    - Reading through the scriptures would suggest that the answer might range from awe and reverence to absolute terror, depending on the situation.
    - But whatever the answer, whatever the situation, **fear of God is an act of faith**- it is a demonstration of one’s belief in God.
    - **And fear of God is an act of hope**- a demonstration of one’s belief that God can and does make a difference in the world and in our lives.
    - It is one’s belief that God has the power and might, and will transform the world of today into something better.
  - Solomon “feared” the Lord- he believed in God.
    - To Solomon, God’s power and might were never a question.
    - He put God first, as he was beginning his rule and it was the beginning of his wisdom.
  - In a way, God asks us the same question today that he asked Solomon
    - “What should I give you?”
    - I wonder how the political leaders and business leaders today might answer God’s question.
      - Would they ask for wisdom, or would they ask for more power, more wealth, more popularity?
      - Would they ask for the ability to discern between good and evil or would they ask for misfortune to fall upon their adversaries?
      - And what answer would **each of us** give today?

### What Paul would say

- I think I know what the Apostle Paul would say.

- He would say, “Choose wisdom.”
  - In the passage today, from his letter to the Ephesians Paul says, “Be careful then how you live, **not as unwise people but as wise**, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit...”
- Make the most of our time? Be filled with the Spirit?
  - As I look inward, I dare say that a good portion of the time, I am not filled with the Spirit, but rather, I am filled with myself.
    - And if we are honest, perhaps most of us might make that same claim.
      - Our humanness causes that.
  - Some of us try to be filled with the Spirit for at least an hour on Sunday morning.
    - And some of us might seem to struggle with even doing that.
- Paul is saying here that wisdom is more than just being filled with knowledge.
  - It’s more about what we **“DO”** with that knowledge.
- There’s a funny story about an engineer, a psychologist and a theologian who were hunting in the wild when they became lost in a snowstorm.
  - They were wandering through the forest when they came across an isolated cabin, out in the middle of nowhere.
  - The hunters knocked on the door of the cabin, hoping to find shelter from the storm.
  - No one answered their knocks, so they tried the door and discovered that the cabin was unlocked, so they entered.
  - It was a simple place—two rooms, with a minimum of household furnishings.
- Nothing was surprising about the cabin except the stove.
  - It was large, cast iron and potbellied.
  - What was unusual was its location- it was suspended in midair by wires attached to beams in the ceiling.
- **“Fascinating,” said the psychologist.** “It is obvious that this lonely trapper, isolated from humanity, has elevated his stove so he can curl up under it and vicariously experience a return to the womb.”

- **“Nonsense!” replied the engineer.** “The man is simply practicing the laws of thermodynamics. By elevating his stove, he has discovered a way to distribute heat more evenly throughout the cabin.”
- **“With all due respect,” interrupted the theologian,** “I’m sure that hanging his stove from the ceiling has religious meaning. Fire ‘lifted up’ has been a religious symbol for centuries.”
- The three continued debating the point, without resolution when the trapper who lived in the cabin finally returned.
  - They immediately asked him why he had hung his heavy, potbellied stove by wires from the ceiling.
    - The trapper’s answer was short and to the point: “Well, I had lots of **wire** and not enough **stove pipe!**”
- What this humorous story points out is that all of the knowledge in the world means little unless it changes what we do.
  - Wisdom is more about what we **DO** than what we **KNOW**.
  - Wisdom is about how we live.
  - Here in this church, we have examined and studied ways to grow.
  - We’ve hired experts and read their reports telling us how to bring others into God’s kingdom.
    - And its good know all of this, but simply gaining that knowledge isn’t enough.
    - Because it’s baptizing individuals, confirming disciples and receiving new members into the church where the rubber hits the road.
    - We did those things last week- it was exciting, energetic and festive.
    - It was special and God’s kingdom grew a little larger, because of it.
- Today’s scriptures are about choice.
  - God gave Solomon a choice- he was asked what God should give him.
  - He could choose anything he wanted- and he asked for wisdom.
  - In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul says we have a choice.
    - We can choose to fill ourselves with the wine of worldliness, with the wine of self-absorption, or we can fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit.
    - Paul calls us to be filled with the Spirit- at all times and places, in everything we do.

- He calls us to remember whose we are- who created us and who redeemed us.
    - He calls us to give thanks and rejoice at all times.
    - To use our time wisely.
    - To make the most of each day.
  - It's all about the choices we make.
- Living faithfully and having thankful hearts, those are choices we make.
  - People who choose to live faithfully
    - People who choose to believe in the power and might of God
    - They are the ones who live with thankful hearts at all times.
  - And that sort of faith turns conventional wisdom on its head.
  - Living in such a way requires a “not-so-common” wisdom.
- But we can have such wisdom.
  - We can choose to live as people who believe in the power and might of God.
  - We can live into that belief and be people who have hope in God.
  - And if we will live like that, God will give us wisdom
    - And we will live with thankful hearts.
  - May it be so, at ALL times.
- Amen.