

Be Wise – Rev. Dr. Alan Dorway
1 Samuel 16:1-13 and Ephesians 5:15-21
March 22, 2020

It can never happen to me. This is my pride talking.

This is what goes through my head when hearing about the latest hoax. We all know it is despicable when one profits or harms another by playing on their sympathy and compassion. I am fearful during this time that new scams will arise and good people will give to help our doctors and nurses only to find out that urgent call from the hospital was false. It is easy for us to say we are wise, but we also know the saying, there is a sucker born every minute.

I used to think scams happened to other people.

However, before Vicki and I were married, I began to downsize my household items. I used different internet selling sites and it was going well.

On one occasion, I was selling a television cabinet. I had a buyer moving into a larger house and wanted it. I agreed and they sent me money and were arranging for pick up. I received a check for \$1500. My asking price was \$150. I called up this person and said, you put one zero to many. They were nice and said this was for the movers as when they arrived, I would just give them the money. I should have started to see red flags, but for some reason, I said okay.

This person said, just cash the check and the movers would contact me within 24 hours. So, I cashed the check. Yet, no call from the movers. I thought this is not right, so I called. No answer, but then the texts started coming in.

Sorry, movers coming.

You said that before.

They're coming.

I'm not so sure now.

Give me a break, I'm moving and can't keep this all straight.

I too am moving and beginning to think you're a fake.

No, why do you think that?

Because the movers are not coming, no one has contacted or tried to contact me.

Yes they are, why does everyone think this is a fake.

Because this doesn't feel right. You are not answering your phone and the check was too much and I'm just going to cancel it.

No don't. Just trust me.

No, (this was right up to the wedding rehearsal) I have busy this weekend, so just note I'll cancel the check.

Text after text plagued me the entire wedding rehearsal and dinner.

After a fun evening, back at my apartment, I had 60 unanswered texts.

This began the night before my wedding where I did not sleep. I should have not slept because I was excited, and I was, but instead I argued with this person for hours. Finally, I broke. They wanted the money back, so I said I'd wire it to them. I was so upset. All of this hassle.

After our wedding pictures, I was talking about this with my brother and I'm so grateful for my sister-in-law who overheard us and being the wise one in the family, she said, go down to your office right now and cancel your check, do not even think of wiring money. She said this is a total hoax. I tried to defend myself as one who would not get taken, she said to my brother, take him down to his office and freeze all of this, now.

We went down to my office and after talking with my bank, having the realization set in I had been duped, figuring out the check was fake (thankfully I had not wired money yet), I paid a cancelation fee, called the number of the person texting me all night to scream a forceful voicemail to them about I hope they suffer in the pits of hell for all eternity, and relaxed to truly enjoy our wedding.

Vicki and I can laugh at this event now, but I am not as wise as I had hoped to be.

I understand and am a little wiser after this experience.

I sympathize with that gut punch and mental head pounding we feel after we have been exposed. Yet, God tells us to be wise. We are invited not to sit or wallow in self-pity, but to learn from times we are unwise, grow in our resolve to see right, and refocus on living in humble truth with each other.

Saul was the first king Israel had. Samuel struggled with this decision as the people did not want a judge to lead them anymore. They wanted a king as other nations had a king. Samuel prayed to God about this and God told the people what it would be like having a king, not as great as they thought and you can read this in 1 Samuel 8.

Yet the people still wanted a king, and Saul was chosen. Samuel had a lot invested in Saul, but Saul struggled and God's favor eventually left him.

Personally, I wrestle with these events, but for today, we read Samuel's anointing of the next king. Samuel goes to Bethlehem on the pretense of worshipping and invited Jesse to attend as well. When Jesse and his sons arrive, Samuel looks at the oldest, Eliab, he thinks, surely this is the new king.

God replies in verse 7, do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

God looks at the heart. God looks beyond and behind what we see externally. God knows our motivations that are held in places no one can see. God is not bound by public opinion or what looks good to the outside world.

All of Jesse's sons appear before Samuel, except one. The youngest of the family is out tending the sheep. He is doing the work because as the youngest, no one thought he needed to be present. This is a classic, seen and not heard underlying stereotype, yet when David appears, God tells Samuel, this is the one. David is anointed and God's spirit mightily comes upon him.

God upends our notions of external success. When Jesus says the first shall be last and the last shall be first, we see this challenge of what we tend to value versus God's plan.

God does not always choose what we would flock to as the best. Samuel saw seven of Jesse's sons, but none was chosen. Samuel even had his favorites, but God searched deeper. We don't know of Jesse's response to this, but maybe he even was thinking, really, none of my older, accomplished, distinguished, maybe even proven in battle sons is good enough? We must go get the youngest.

Now David sinned. David had flaws.

David was not perfect, so we should not equate God's choice with being a perfect human. God sees past what we do, even our imperfections. God's decisions are made with God's all-knowing understanding, so where does that leave us? Does this leave us stranded and unable to make decisions or do we rush, determining what we think are the right criteria to be wise in uncertain times?

The lectionary pairs our first text with the Ephesians passage where we learn more about these questions. Paul writes the church in Ephesus that wisdom is linked to how we live.

Paul reminds the church to be wise is to gently assess how we live. If we are living with no care, if we think the night has won and our actions will not be seen, then we are not wise. Wisdom looks like being filled with the Holy Spirit, giving thanks, and submitting to one another.

These verses pack a lot in. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not fluff. Singing hymns and praise is not to overlook reality, but to keep our hearts aligned with God. This is not 'fake happy until you are happy'.

Instead, making melody to God in our hearts grounds us in a kingdom view. The world and our world can be upside down, but God never leaves us. Holding the tune of God's love in our hearts reminds us of God's provision.

Being thankful is not a distraction from wisdom. Honesty about how God has cared for us, taking time to name the blessings in our lives, is a wise way to move us away from selfish drives in our heart to a wise posture of the overarching goodness and grace of God.

Submitting to one another is not servitude.

We are not to have any lord over us except Jesus. We are not to have idols in our lives. Yet, we have a hard time with submitting to each other. We can fathom submitting to God and serving alongside the Holy Spirit, but there is a wisdom and a trust when we serve each other. When we hold each other as equals in the kingdom of God, then we can learn and grow through the collective wisdom of the new community we are a part of.

God sees our intentions. This is a concerning thought, but this should not frighten us. As God chose David, we know there are moments when Jesus will lead us along the way because he alone knows it.

We have hope and trust in God's wisdom, but we wonder about missing what the Spirit is doing. As Christians we spend a lot of good time seeking Christ. This is discernment. This is our best attempt at calming ourselves down to listen and follow the Spirit.

To grow in our wisdom, we can attune our heart to the melody of God. We can reflect on and be thankful for Jesus' blessings in our lives. We can build trust, respect for each other. From this, we can submit, serve, not as lording over one another, but as co-workers bringing about God's kingdom as we work to be community together. This is how we gain wisdom.

Our passages speak to our today. As I shared last week, not being together for worship or as the community we've built up around us is hard for everyone. I crave community and have a fierce sense of independence.

I want to believe I know what's right and that I can foresee and foretell the best path; not just for me, but for everyone. I have this clear vision of justice in my mind and heart that

can be unrelenting in hunkering down and not budging for any reason. But as many of you know, I am not perfect and I need to learn.

I want to be wise, yet again for those who know me, my ranting, pontificating, and zealotry is one directional rather than wise.

We are in a new space of collective wisdom. Yes, God knows our hearts. Jesus knows that people are suffering and how others are taking advantage of the system.

God knows the posturing and positioning of leaders to deflect blame or cast negativity on others. Jesus grieves with those suffering. God is with the families separated while trying to be healthy. The Spirit sustains our doctors, nurses, and care professionals. And we can get this. Our triune God is present, leading, and has all of this in his hands.

Yet, there is a call for collective wisdom.

We are being invited to attune our hearts, sing words of faith to Jesus. There are plenty of days when we need to have a new song in our hearts, where those songs cover frustration of being confined, those words tune out negativity, and can spark new life into familiar spaces. This is being wise.

We are invited to move away from selfish hoarding of supplies and resources as we are thankful. We may not have everything we think we need, but when our hearts are full of the times we have been blessed by Jesus and each other, we can take a step back. How many times are we thankful looking at the mountains or water?

We can all think of a sunrise or sunset that took our breath away. When we have those gifts, then we don't need the last roll of toilet paper. Sure, hand sanitizer is practical, but knowing we've witnessed a child laughing or we have had those times when our laughter causes us to cry, is purer than almost anything.

The unique invite is to submit to each other. This is challenging. We can get overwhelmed with facts, news, talking heads or a multitude of information regarding how we are to be community now. We have our biases and hunches.

We can inflate our egos and strut our knowledge. We are gifted and talented. Plus all our elected officials have given us guidelines. Our presbytery and our church have set policies in place.

Yes, I want to go to the movies. I wanted to watch the NCAA tournament. I'm bummed the Cubs are weeks away from beginning another run to a World Series title.

But, being wise has meant I have had to submit.

I do not know my own immune system, let alone yours.

As much as I wash my hands or cover my cough, I am not confident my hand on the door handle then shaking your hand and you welcome another and suddenly we pass along harmful germs.

I do not want to be the cause or the reason for someone not getting the necessary medical care because my stubbed toe exhausted a nurse and doctor to where they could not see someone truly in need. I know these are slightly silly examples, but we are invited to submit to the common good of our larger human community.

Currently, we face new, challenging, and different moments daily. We know God is wise and in control, but it can be harder for us to gain and grow in wisdom when we stumble over our own concerns and various information.

The good news is rather than get caught up in panic or disarray over where is the Holy Spirit, we can align our hearts with the songs of praise, we ground ourselves in being thankful, and we can learn wisdom as we serve and work together.

Setting aside our ego is difficult, but with humility and grace, we can support each other as together we seek and find the kingdom of God. Amen.