

Sermon : Wisdom and Grace, John 6:51-58 – Ben Helmer

Two old friends recently met at a school reunion. They had not seen each other for 35 years. During that time they had each married, raised children, worked to support their families and, they discovered, been active members of their churches. As they walked into dinner, one looked at the other and said, “We’ve aged well, but our hair has gotten gray, and we’re sagging in places. What have we got to say for ourselves?” His friend smiled and said, “Wisdom!”

A local Rotary club was having a hard time getting a major fundraiser off the ground. People were distracted and nobody was volunteering for the jobs that needed to be done. The organizers were both discouraged when they met with their club president, an older woman. As they talked over lunch, their president had many suggestions for how to move forward, and all of them involved giving precise tasks to people and asking them if they would do a certain job, rather than a general asking for volunteers. At the next meeting all the tasks were assigned and the activity was a success.

These two stories illustrate something we all know: maturity and experience are valuable traits in our culture. They are in our churches as well.

From the earliest times of our ancestral faith, wisdom has always been upheld as a part of spiritual growth and development. As we grow in knowledge and love of God, we should expect to see changes in ourselves. Our tent should become bigger, not smaller. Our generosity of spirit should broaden and deepen. And we should see elders among us as gifts of wisdom and grace, especially in times of difficulty.

A church was having a conflict over worship times. There were those who wanted one service, and those who preferred an early service without music. As the discussion went on and became more divisive, one member said, “But we’ve never had an early service.” An elder stood up and replied, “Oh yes we have. I can remember ...” and her explanation and tone changed

the whole focus of the discussion. Elders are often sources of wisdom, and they carry the corporate history of a congregation.

But there is another side to all of this talk of wisdom: it comes in today's gospel reading from John. Jesus says, "I am the living bread. ... Whoever eats of this bread will live forever." It seems that wisdom alone does not grant us participation in the kingdom. Wisdom is rather a doorway to spiritual living that includes the Eucharist as part of our regular practice. The Eucharist feeds us with the living bread that sustains us, helps us grow in Christ, and brings us peace and maturity of life, at whatever age we may be.

As we watch Jesus dealing with the people who come to him, some pleading, some confronting, others curious, we see him over and over again answering their questions with simplicity, kindness and great power. He cannot be trapped by the powers of this world, except by his own choice; he cannot be bought or tempted by the devil; and he is not compromised.

Our Christian wisdom should direct us to act in terms of our Baptismal Covenant, seeking and serving Christ in all persons. Our spiritual maturity should energize us to work to see the Christ in all persons. Our spiritual wisdom should help us know that does not mean we have to give others what they want, but what they need. Our combined maturity and wisdom should lead us to remember our own need for Sabbath, the rest that restores and renews us.

Finally, the living bread that sustains us should always be our quest: Jesus, whose prayer, mind and deeds show us what to do, Jesus whose flesh and blood instill new life within us, Jesus who lives in us that we might live forever. Amen.