



ST NINIAN'S UNITING CHURCH
JULY 16th 2025
PRAYERS AND REFLECTION
Based on Ecclesiastes 9:13-18



Wisdom Superior to Folly

¹³I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. ¹⁴There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. ¹⁵Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. ¹⁶So I said, "Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded."

¹⁷The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools. ¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one bungler destroys much good.

Our opening prayer for this week is a call on God's wisdom and for us to know what living with humility looks like.

O Lord, you are the source of all wisdom and truth, and as I sit in my usual quiet place, I know that I sit before you with a heart ready to be humbled by the lesson of the kind of quiet wisdom that saved a city. Teach me Lord to value the gentle word over the clamorous voice, and to treasure wisdom more than weapons of war.

In a world where folly often shouts the loudest, help us all to be better listeners for your still, small but strong voice. Grant each of us the discernment to recognise wisdom exists in unexpected places, give us the strength to follow its path, even when it goes unnoticed by others.

May our hearts remain humble, so we might never despise the wisdom of the poor or overlook the power of the quiet voices. Help us to be peacemakers with a heart ready to understand the needs of others, always trusting your wisdom will speak louder to us than that of the world. Lord, I pray that your peace and understanding is the basis of all that we do, trusting that your wisdom overrides our arrogance.

Lord, be our guide in this noisy world and lead us to live lives of quiet influence, as we seek the treasures of your wisdom and truth in all we say and do. May we honour you with the choices we make, as we bring glory to your holy name through our everyday actions. In your name I pray today amen.

Prayer points of praise and thanksgiving

- ❖ Praise God for the gift of accessibility to God's wisdom
- ❖ Praise for the teaching of the values discovered in listening to God's voice

- ❖ Praise for acknowledging there is a place for the quiet voices to impact a noisy world which focuses on the noisy crowds.

Prayer Points of Thanksgiving

- ❖ Thank you, Lord, for being given a place in this world which is mine to own – being your faithful child.
- ❖ Thank you, Lord, for having ears to hear your wisdom in the teaching of others
- ❖ Thank you, Lord, for your one and only Son Jesus for his sacrificial life so I may know there is hope for a poor person's life.

Prayer Points of Confession

- ❖ Forgive me Holy One for:
 - having a high opinion of myself at the expense of deepening my faith
 - for the folly of not engaging with peacemakers or trying to understand the needs of others.
 - for not seeking to grow a stronger spiritual relationship with you, preferring to remain spiritually poor and unwise depending only on my own preferences

Words of Grace

God is love. Through Christ your sins are forgiven. Take hold of this forgiveness and live your life in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Reflection

This reading is part of the longest literary works that we know of from Mesopotamia known as the Epic of Gilgamesh, a tale of an ancient king's failed quest for immortality. It's a very ancient work, going way back to at least 2000 BCE. It follows the trials and adventures of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk. (Archeological Study Bible)

The part that we're looking at presents us with a reflection on wisdom, the unpredictability of life, and the value of discernment. Discernment is such an important part of our faith when used as a guide for going in a particular direction of faith, mission, ministry and so much more. It's vital in answering God's call on our lives. In our reading 9:13-18 the Teacher is sharing a parable about a wise but long forgotten person who saved a city from destruction. His wisdom, though initially revered, ultimately fades into obscurity. How quickly do we forget words and events of the past or name them as irrelevant!

The parable contains at least four themes; you may be able to find more:

The first being the value of wisdom: The author wants us to know that wisdom is a powerful tool. The wise person's ability to save the city demonstrates that insight and

knowledge can have positive results. However, it also reveals that wisdom can also be overlooked and unappreciated, emphasising its fleeting nature in a world that often values power and popularity over intellect and positive outcomes that actually benefit everyone rather than those of a particular class or power base.

Secondly, the transience of recognition: despite his significant contributions, the wise person is soon forgotten. This can serve as a reminder to us of the transitory nature of human accolades and the tendency for society to quickly move on. It raises questions about the nature of achievement and legacy – what does it mean to be remembered, and does it truly matter if wisdom isn't recognised? Depending on the existence of a relationship with Christ will influence how you might reflect on that question.

At a SYNOD meeting many years ago there was a question concerning what kind of legacy the then members of the UCA were going to leave for following generations? From where I now sit the legacy is one of never forgetting or releasing the importance of discerning where God's wisdom is leading God's church and seeing where God continues to be active in God's creation so we can interact with God's people in the world. Christ remains the centre of our ministry, mission, discipleship, engagement in our local communities and teachings.

Thirdly is the capriciousness of life: the passage contrasts wisdom with the unpredictability of fate. While wisdom is valuable and much needed, it doesn't guarantee success or recognition. This serves as a sobering thought on life's uncertainties and disappointments, acknowledging that even the most prudent and thoughtful decisions can lead to unforeseen outcomes.

Finally, we can see a theme of a call to value wisdom: so, don't give up even when you face disappointment. Ultimately, we can be encouraged to cherish wisdom, even if its benefits aren't immediately apparent or celebrated. The mention of 'quiet words of the Wise' suggests to us that there is great strength to be found and experiences in humility and the art of subtlety.

There is more to think about than we first thought when reading Ecc 9:13-18 as it encourages us to go deeper into our appreciation for wisdom and a recognition of its often-uncelebrated role in our lives, challenging us to seek understanding and to value the quiet influence of wise counsel, even when it goes unnoticed. The extraverts have a place in this world, however, that doesn't mean the introverts need to go unnoticed or unheard.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS - please feel free to put your own thoughts into this prayer

As we finish this time together today, I am reminded of the encouragement found in your Word. In my quiet moment of reflection, I acknowledge that life is all too often uncertain and moments of hope too often are just fleeting – gone before I know it Lord as expressed in Ecclesiastes! The wise person speaks of the unpredictable nature of

events that transpire in our world, and yet, amidst this uncertainty, I seek to embody your love and compassion for those who are living with illnesses of so many descriptions. I pray for your hope to be known to those who are living in places of war and violence and depravation.

Lord, I ask for your grace to fill not only my heart but also those who only know how to survive in an often hostile way, fill my heart with understanding and empathy. Let me not be quick to judge or dismiss those who find them in circumstances beyond their control. Help us all to see the struggles of others with clarity and compassion, recognising that we are all woven into the fabric of humanity, sharing in the joys and burdens of life.

May I be a vessel of your kindness, offering support and love to those who feel lost or overlooked. Grant your people the wisdom to understand that, despite our individual differences, we are all deserving of grace and compassion. Let my actions and words reflect your heart, reminding others that they're not alone in the struggles.

In my moments of despair and darkness, may I have the strength of a loving faith to extend a hand to lift others up, as together we grow a community built on hope, love and support. Help me to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly in this life, understanding that true wisdom isn't measured by knowledge alone but by the depth of our compassion, for each other and the world.

Thank you for being our source of hope and strength. May your spirit guide us in spreading love and understanding, as we navigate the complexities of life together.

In your loving presence we pray

Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaqd4-5mhcc>

