

Pentecost 5 Matt 11 25 **Simple Wisdom, Sophisticated Folly** July 5 20

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

In Matthew 11:25, Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;

You have hidden these things from the wise and learned: The sense here is not that God actively hides himself, for he reveals himself in Christ Jesus, but that something in humans prevents His presence from getting through or being seen. Jesus describes that “something,” as being “wise and learned.” This is clearly a reference to the scribes and Pharisees who fancied themselves as experts in religion, the professionally religious. However, it would also include anyone like the inhabitants of the unrepentant cities in Matthew 11: 20-24, who has disabled him or herself by pride.

It could equally well be applied all unregenerate human beings who have not been enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

The second part of Jesus’ statement is that the Father has revealed these things to infants: The Greek word used is nepioi, “infants,” who are powerless, ignorant and totally dependent, and unlike the “wise and learned,” they hear and perceive what Jesus is saying and see what he is doing and have become the really “wise.”

In verse twenty-six, Jesus continues, saying, “Such has been your gracious will”: It is not that some dim-witted people happened to stumble upon the truth and that smart folk missed the point, but that God the Father planned things this way. He never intended intellectual talents to be a prerequisite for “knowing” him.

You see, there are two general reactions to Jesus and his teaching: rejection or acceptance. Surprisingly and ironically, the people who should have known better rejected Jesus and those who would be expected to reject him, actually understood him and even accepted him.

Those schooled in religion- the religious professionals, priests, scribes and religious teachers- those who had benefit of a religious education and should have been able to discern the Messiah, when, at last he came, rejected Jesus. Those too poor to be able to afford an education and too “underclass,” to have the opportunity or access to any form of social advancement, those were much more inclined to accept Jesus. Jesus called the one group “wise and learned” because that’s what they considered themselves to be. They were serious; He was being sarcastic.

Jesus was especially critical of the Pharisees and their brand of religion. It was all rules and no rest, all work and no play. They would look for a commandment in the Old Testament to apply to every situation and where they found none they took an existing one and stretched its meaning until it applied to a variety of situations never envisioned by the original commandment. They went beyond God’s intentions in order to back up their own conventional thinking and practices. The result was that religion appeared to the average person as so complicated that one needed an “expert,” to consult before every decision, small and large.

And the “experts” looked down upon the populace as “babes in the woods,” needing, but not heeding, their guidance. They considered themselves to be of superior mind to the hoi polloi, “the people of the land” as they would refer to them, even today some clergy like to refer to the laity, their “inferiors,” as “the people.”

It should be noted that many professions consider themselves superior to the average person on the street, such as lawyers, medical doctors etc.

The “wise and learned,” also includes any and all human achievers, people who think they do what they do because of their own insights, powers, talents, and merits. Such people truly believe that they can “by their own reason and strength” fathom the mysteries of the world and control their own destinies.

Because they are superior to the great, unwashed masses, they enjoy greater benefits and, in their minds, deservedly so. Especially when an advanced degree is required to enter their specialized field of employment.

Jesus himself knew these temptations to pride. He, of all people, had a right to be proud, to look down on others, to secretly, if not openly, scoff at human stupidity and ineptitude. Jesus was quite clear that the message He was bringing to humans is not grasped by human wisdom, intelligence or wit; it is only known by revelation. He was quite clear that such was the way He himself received it- by revelation from the Father. Humility behooves humanity, so Jesus took it on when God became one of us and one with us. That is what Jesus means by the “easy” yoke.

The text portrays the exchange of the burden of sin for the free gift of God’s grace as Jesus, the Son, makes the Father known to us. The wrath and condemnation described immediately before the text is carried by Christ, and He replaces it with forgiveness, life, and salvation earned on the Cross. The invitation to come and find rest in Christ has been extended to us in Holy Baptism. In baptism, the burden of our sin is removed in Christ, and He places upon us the yoke of his Gospel. His light burden and easy yoke become for us the cause of our rejoicing as those to whom the Son has revealed the Father.

It is also easy because Jesus is the other half of the “yoked” team. This truth does not negate the human intellect, but it complements it. Jesus was not against intellectual power, but intellectual pride. The human intellect can only do what God has designed it to do, no more. While we can know something of God by its power, such knowledge is limited and nowhere near what revelation can open us up to. What Jesus brings us is God himself in human form we can relate to and through whom we can grasp whatever knowledge of God that God wants us to know. If humans want to know what God is like, what He likes and what He would like humans to become, they have only to look to Jesus. To do this, however, we must humble ourselves and confess that we are indeed “poor, miserable sinners who cannot save ourselves from this sinful condition.”

Jesus is not merely fodder for theologians. Of course, we are to “study,” Jesus. However, we study him as we would study, like an “understudy” in the theater, a person, not a book or a script. Because Jesus is open to all people, educated and not, brilliant and not, all people can come to know God through him.

The only truly dumb people in the world are those who think they know something because they feel it in their hearts and/or those who think they can know **everything** about the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent God.

Even though Jesus knew God firsthand, He remained humble. Humility, not intellectual knowledge, makes following Jesus “easy” as we receive His free gifts.

When Jesus zoned in on the human situation, on how ridiculous the proud, especially the religiously proud, really are, He looked at it with a divine sense of humor. It is not that God ridicules our pride, rather He gently and ironically smiles. He knows we are setting ourselves up for a fall and He permits it in order that we might learn and come to Him. The truly learned and wise are the really humble. Those who see from God’s perspective, know they cannot live the way God wants them to live without outside help.

Humans need a Savior. Those who think they can do this on their own power do not realize that they have no power on their own. They cannot acquire it, earn it, achieve it, and certainly not manufacture it. Instead of taking upon themselves the yoke of God that will make their human work easier, they “chafe at the bit,” wanting to be free of God’s direction and discipline, and end up losing their lives in slavery to the Lie.

Humility is acceptance of our fallen, creaturely status. Such humility, when it turns us to Christ, takes the pressure off of life’s “burdens,” and makes them bearable. That is how Christians can live “bearing the cross.” Because the direction and discipline of God gives us the spiritual power to lift the weight of life off of our shoulders, because we have Christ’s yoke upon our shoulders.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30 ESV).

Wise and learned sums up the best of human achievers. But it is not by the exercise of one’s gifts that the presence of the kingdom can be detected. Self-sufficiency blinds one to dependence and humility. As we sing in the Magnificat, “He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly (Luke 1:52).

This does not mean that all the wise are lost and all the “infants” are saved, but it will be by simple trust in Jesus and Him crucified for us, not by our intellectual skills and knowledge that we will be saved. Jesus condemns intellectual **pride** not intellectual power.

Wisdom is the person of the Son and his teaching. Wisdom is to be found at the “school” of Jesus. But the Son is more than a wisdom teacher; He is the Son. Whoever believes in **that** person and **His work for you**, has not just wisdom, but everlasting life.

The burdens and challenges of life in this world remain; however, the easy yoke of Christ and the Gospel enable those to whom Christ has revealed himself, to endure the trials and tribulations they face. The invitation of Christ is to those who are burdened and heavy laden, and indeed we are all burdened and heavy laden in many and various ways. But Christ has first removed the burden of our sin, and He also, by his grace, assists us in bearing all of the other burdens of our lives. Finally, at the Last Day, by grace through faith, He will also remove all burdens from us, lift us up and our lot will be the full, easy yoke of eternal life with Him in His kingdom.

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!