

We are learning and computing at a fantastic rate in schools and businesses around the world. When I read the advice of the wise in the book of Proverbs, however, I realize why it has stood the test of time. The lessons of the wisdom teacher hold true whether in the Hebrew struggle of old, or the world of today. While we are surrounded by a constant stream of information, it is important to stay grounded – in family, in church, in faith. It's important to realize that God must be first. That was the message in Luke's book as the disciples re-assembled and found their way.

Did you notice the intimacy of the message: "My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments? Do not forsake loyalty and faithfulness. Trust in the Lord. Do not rely on your own insight." In the book of Acts, that is exactly the message – we do not do what we do of our own power, but only in the name of Jesus the Christ.

We are a nation caught up in new insights and technology all around us. It can be overwhelming. I've noticed something recently as I drive around various cities and towns. I don't see parking meters anymore. In Illinois, however, they are prevalent on most streets of large cities. I remember trying to outrun a meter maid in Chicago one day because the fines are so high.

A while back, I was reading about parking meters at U of C in Santa Barbara. They are now part of a network. Their parking meters are loaded with computer chips and antennas that allow you to call with your cell phone and buy more time! And coming soon are networked parking meters that can report information to a web site. If you drive into an area and want to know where to find an open spot, you simply access the web site from your cell phone and find an unused meter. You can even reserved them meter for five minutes – a reserved sign pops up until you get there! Of course, you pay for those minutes.

I don't know about you, but with all the convenience, I kind of enjoyed running and trying to talk to meter maid out of the citation. It was fun to see the smile on her face as I rattled off all the reasons that I had arrived just at the same time she did and surely she could just let me put in my quarter, dime or nickel.

Certainly, a variety of gadgets are making our life easier and I do love gadgets. Sewing machines can now download images and embroider them onto a garment. Swim goggles keep track of time and laps with a display on the inside of the lenses of Olympic swimmers. And some gas pumps are running Microsoft Windows, allowing you to order coffee, download music and check traffic while you fill your tank. It's almost as though we have shifted into another galaxy, much as when electricity became the norm and hand drills became power drills and ice boxes became refrigerators.

But I have to tell you, there's this old fashioned girl in me that enjoys human contact. I know, when I'm busy it's easy to run over to the bank at 8 p.m. and use the ATM. And it is so convenient to be able to shop at midnight, alone at your computer screen, but there is something about touching a product and having someone hang or wrap it up and thank you for your business that just can't be beat.

We hear of people all the time who don't attend worship on Sunday morning. They watch it on TV. Do you see what's happening there? They are not participants. They are spectators, like football fans. They have no human contact with other worshipers, no interaction before or after worship, no responsibility, no purpose – other than as a viewer. But as Christians, we were never meant to be an audience. We were always meant to be a congregation – a family!

I think of this every time we share Holy Communion. Imagine sitting in your living room, watching a service on television. When it's time for Communion, you run out to the kitchen and grab a piece of bread and some juice or wine, whatever you have, and there, as the deacons take the plate of bread and the cups from the pastors and serve it to those in the congregation, you eat alone. You drink alone. Alone.

The church is the place where we gather together to do the work and will of God to be sure. But it is so much more. Through the church, we have the opportunity to reach beyond ourselves and touch the lives of others and allow them to touch us! Last week after worship alone we celebrated the birthday of one of our eldest members and Benevolence Board hosted a bake sale that would help our

young people attend summer camp. This week we will host a Memorial Service for someone who gave her life to teaching and then ministry and we will bring comfort to her husband and family. Recently we hosted a clothing drive so that those without clothing could come and help themselves and then we delivered the rest to those in need all over the city. All the talents and gifts shared by the entire church family. We offer ourselves to the community.

Advances in technology include communication. Have any of you heard of a new system called Home Heartbeat that connects sensors on all major appliances, doors and fixtures in a home? You can program the system to tell you, by text message or e mail, every time the front door opens, the TV turns on and off, or the washing machine finishes its cycle. It's all a network of communicating. Well, I believe God has always wanted us to be part of a network as well – the network of Christ's love. Even in the Hebrew scriptures, did you notice that the message in today's lesson speaks of being connected to wisdom? And what's so innovative about the passages is that wisdom is portrayed as a woman, a flesh and blood character who strides into the middle of human chaos and delivers a powerful message from the Lord.

If we continue to read chapter 1, in verse we read, "Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice." At the busiest corner where everyone is rushing past with their shopping or business, she cries out, speaking her message at the entrance to the city. Did you notice something that is familiar there? At the busiest corner.....with people rushing by..... Kind of sounds like us! Wisdom does not hide in the safety of the church sanctuary, or in the calm and quiet of a Bible study classroom, but moves confidently into the raucous world of high tech parking meters and Windows running gas pumps.

Lady Wisdom challenges us to embrace the complexity of this world that God has created and to plug into a network of Christians who are exploring what it means to be a people of faith in a fast paced, high tech, multicultural community.

Our problem with becoming wise is not that knowledge is unavailable. Rather, our failure to gain wisdom has more to do with our being unwilling to follow the guidance of mentors, friends, parents and teachers and especially our scriptures in a process of lifelong learning. So many of us pursue advanced degrees in technical fields in our every day lives, but we graduate from Sunday School as children and never move beyond an elementary understanding of the Christian faith. And how can we possibly live out our faith in the world if we don't really know what that faith is or how it should be applied in our day to day lives?

While living on Marco Island, I was often invited to pray at the beginning of city council meetings. As I awaited the beginning of the meeting one evening, a man turned around and said to me, "What are you doing getting involved in city matters? Don't you know that religion and city business don't go together? Haven't you heard of the separation of city and state?"

I was taken aback .....for just a moment, but then I decided to respond. I said, "First of all, I'm not just a Pastor, but a citizen. But more importantly, have you read church history? Do you realize that almost every major university, hospital, orphanage and nursing home in this country was first started by those affiliated with the church? And think of every major civil rights struggle – who led those struggles to assure equality and justice for all people? It was the Church – the people who believed in a message of love and peace. And we do those things together, not separately.."

How many of us step out and struggle for justice and peace in our community today? How many people, when they see or hear someone doing or saying something truly evil will speak up and at least intervene? There's a new TV show that asks, "What would you do?" Good question.

Wisdom? How many people sign up for adult education classes to better understand the meaning of our Sunday morning scriptures? There are so many opportunities within the life of the church for us to gain wisdom and knowledge from a variety of resources.

This morning, we're going to receive reports and give thanks to all those who have served this church in remarkable ways during his transition time and then we will elect the leaders who will work and dream and plan for the future of this Church. Where will they find the wisdom to do what God is calling them to do?

This morning we find the voice of the wise telling us that God wants us to be wise and connected to one another, like the Home Heartbeat system that links our home appliances and clearly communicates what each one is doing. I believe God desires that we each know about his will and his way. But God wants more – we are invited to work together – help each other, take pride in the accomplishments of every single member of the church, to be truly connected one to another..

In verse 23 of chapter 1, Lady Wisdom speaks: “I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make my words known to you.” Notice that the voice speaks as though there is nothing secret about God’s wisdom, nothing that mysterious. The Wise One speaks, “There are commandments. Obey them; study them.” We have Beatitudes’; nine of them; pay attention. There are wisdom words. and there is the death and resurrection and new life of Jesus. Let it be a reality – wisdom..

In this age of technology, I often wonder if we spend as much time reading or interpreting scripture as we do with our computer manual, or budgets, or policies and guidelines, or by-laws or even the daily or weekly newspaper?

The scripture not only requires interpretation, it requires application. If you break the commandments, you will hurt yourself. If you ignore the Beatitudes, you will not come to know and experience the kingdom of God. If you fail to love God and your neighbor, you will miss out on a distinctively Christian life. If you turn away from the teachings of Jesus, and from the church that is his body in the world today, you will fail to make the connection that promises you the deepest joy and satisfaction you will ever know in this life.

As I was discussing this sermon with a friend and told him about the new parking meters, he said, “So if you miss the wisdom of the scriptures and of the connection with Christ’s church, you’re like one of the old parking meters, stuck in concrete and standing alone on the side of the street as everyone passes you by.” Lady Wisdom relates: “Those who listen to me will be secure, will live at ease without dread of disaster.”

Natural law, moral law, the wisdom of parents, the guidance of the scriptures – all these, when we listen and act wisely, are not only good for us, but bring us joy. Being wise is being connected – to Christ, to the church, to the community. It’s the future – and we walk into it together – but never alone. Amen.

Preached by Rev. Joy A. Baumgartner on May 16, 2010