

July 23rd 2023, Matins

1 Kings 2: 10-12, 3: 16-end and Acts 4: 1-22

Mother Alice

I recently acquired a new gadget, which is a smart watch. It is really quite amazing – it can tell me all kinds of things about how far and how fast I have run, but also about my body – my sleep data, heartrate, my stepcount, something called my VO2 Max (although I'm not totally sure what this is), and various other things. In fact I haven't fully understood all the different features and the data that it can generate. But this smartwatch also becomes smarter the more I wear it – it understands more about my movements, and can begin to make predictions, for instance about how fast I might race a certain distance. And it also begins to notify me of things – to tell me to move more, or faster, or differently, in order to improve my fitness. It can also tell me that I need to slow down, to rest, that my energy levels are low. Like all technology you can change how it notifies you, but I've found myself ever more intrigued and curious by all of this data – hungry to know more, understand more, learn from this really rather clever gadget.

But I've also realised that a smartwatch, whatever data it can give you about yourself, is never going to replace the wisdom of a trainer or coach. You can't have a relationship with a piece of technology – data can motivate but never congratulate with a hug and a cheer. It can remember your heartrate but never see into your soul and notice your fear or your joy. It doesn't even know your name. It may be smart, but wise it is not.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom' writes King David in the Psalms. And this morning I want us to reflect on this question of Wisdom – of what it means, of how we obtain it, and of how we discern and call out that divine wisdom which we as followers of Jesus Christ desire above all else. Because we are created by a God who made us to know us, and us to know Him.

Wisdom is such a beautiful word, and one I feel which has fallen out of fashion. We talk about leaders having integrity or courage, but wisdom has something really strong and yet really gentle about it, and I think that's because Wisdom IS divine in origin. It's like love, it can only ever come from God. When we encounter true wisdom we encounter something of God, glimpses of the divine purpose, and beauty and meaning for all creation. The more I think about it the more I think the desire for wisdom should be the perpetual prayer of our hearts, longing to beat with the rhythm of the Holy Spirit.

This hideous story about the two women and their babies from 1 Kings nevertheless shows the wisdom that God gave King Solomon very clearly. It's an unthinkable situation, and yet he holds that space with gentle firmness, and makes his decision with clarity and compassion. And no wonder then that *'all Israel stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice'*. I wonder if you have ever experienced a truly wise judgement being made, something that showed you someone laying aside their power and personal preference in favour of what was truly right, and in so doing opened up a window into the beauty of the Divine? I've seen wisdom so often, but I've also felt its lack often too. Churches are not always places of wisdom, they can be places of division and strife. But if our hearts are seeking God, if we are deeply prayerful and expectant of the Holy Spirit, then we too can be blown away by the wisdom and justice of God that will break through our unruly hearts and bring a peace to silence the strife.

It's moving too this account of Peter and John in the Acts of the Apostles. They are so faithful, so bold, so joyful in their proclamation of the Gospel and the ministry of healing. I love how throughout the Book of Acts we have these rather casual commentaries thrown in, that 5000 were added to the number of the Apostles in that day. It's extraordinary, its wonderful! The Holy Spirit is so tangibly present that people cannot help but respond. But it's juxtaposed with fear and oppression. The Apostles are attracting so much attention that the authorities don't know what to do with them, and so they are put in prison. And they are asked this question: *'By what power or by what name did you do this?'*. The rulers and authorities SEE that they have Wisdom, that there is something within them which they are attracted to, curious about, baffled by, and fearful of. They want to know – where does this come from? How are you doing this? And Peter and John are simply honest, they proclaim that it is the name of Jesus that give them authority to heal, Jesus who was raised from the dead, Jesus who is the cornerstone and Jesus who is the name through which salvation is coming. And what do the authorities say in response? *'We cannot deny this'*. They see that it is true, and yet they still feel anxious about this power, and feel they somehow need to contain it. Well of course they do! They have seen the Wisdom and power of God and they cannot deny it, and yet they somehow cannot respond to it.

And I wonder if we too can be like this. We can see Wisdom – not just in a judgement, but in an answered prayer, in a relationship, in a complicated personal circumstance – we can see it, we cannot deny it, and yet we do not give God the glory. We do not acknowledge this is Wisdom is God himself, in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom moving amongst us, breathing through us, making things Holy, and right, and beautiful. The rulers and authorities desire to *'keep it from spreading'*, but Peter and John answer *'Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for WE cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard'*. The proclamation of the gospel is so often hindered because we just don't speak about what we have seen and heard. We encounter God and his extraordinary wisdom, but we do not give him the glory, or we do not tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord. The early Church grew because the people told other people what they had seen and heard, they spoke of Jesus Christ, they spoke of the Holy Spirit coming among them, they spoke of bodies healed and lives transformed. They saw Wisdom – and they couldn't keep from speaking about it.

Jesus said that wisdom was justified by her fruits – that we will know what is of God and what is not. And that is true, isn't it? We are able to see and hear when God is truly in our midst. When the Holy Spirit speaks – and we know that peace which the world cannot give. This is Wisdom! When at the name of Jesus someone receives healing. This is Wisdom! When through words, or music, or art, or the natural world, suddenly something inside us opens up and something makes sense. This is Wisdom! This is God here amongst us. Wisdom is the knowledge and fear of the God who made us, who loves us, who knows us by name, who desires our wellbeing and flourishing. Wisdom isn't just right, wisdom is beautiful, precious, more to be desired even than sweet honey dripping from the comb. Let us seek Wisdom, receive wisdom, proclaim wisdom. And may we be like the Apostles, that we will always seek to bring glory to God, that we will be those who in this this generation cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard, that many children of God will hear and respond and themselves know Wisdom for themselves.

Amen