

Text: Proverbs 1:1-7

Title: Becoming a Wise People

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For: Community CRC, Kitchener, ON

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Some of Brian's family - his mom's side - hails from Pella, Iowa. A small group of Dutch immigrants settled there a couple centuries ago and now it's a pocket of Dutch nostalgia and history and fake windmills hidden in the middle of Iowa cornfields. The tulips are gorgeous. The streets immaculate. And the delicious smell of cookies and cakes from Jaarsma's bakery fills the whole town square.

On one trip to Pella for an informal family reunion, we were having coffee and homemade raisin buns in the front room of Brian's grandmother's apartment. Folks were catching up with each other. There was laughter and conversation. Brian and I had just shared that we were expecting our first child. So there was congratulations and celebration - of the quiet, gentle, lowan variety.

Brian's grandmother, Bertha, had left the room and when she returned she was carrying in her arms what looked like a blanket. I thought maybe she was concerned in her grandmotherly way that this pregnant lady was cold. But no. She placed the blanket in our laps and as Brian and I unfolded it, we saw what it was:

a beautiful hand-stitched quilt.

This was a family quilt. Made by Bertha's grandmother's generation. Probably around the time that Bertha's Dutch immigrant ancestors made their home in the cornfields of Iowa.

The quilt showed the skill and the knowledge of the hands who made it. No machines touched this quilt. Just the hands of a generation of women gathered together, piecing this quilt together from scraps and fabric leftovers, from the poverty of their situation as immigrants in a foreign land far from home and from the riches of their skill as homemakers and quilters and artists.

The family quilt was passed down with love from generation to generation. From Bertha's grandmother to her daughter and then from a mother to her daughter, and then from a great-grandmother to a little one not yet born.

When we come to the Book of Proverbs it is easy to imagine it written by a professor-type in his study - removed from daily life and concerns and spouting off clever sayings. Or imagining wise king Solomon off in his gold palace writing his wise and esoteric thoughts out on a scroll. And if we're smart enough, we can figure out what the writer meant and be smart too.

But Proverbs isn't like that.

**Proverbs is more like that family quilt pieced together by skill and hands and passed from one generation to the next than a treatise on wisdom written by one really smart person.**

The opening verse attributes the whole book of Proverbs to Solomon son of David and many of his proverbs make up a good chunk of the middle of the book. But this is similar to saying all the psalms are attributed to David. Not that he wrote all of them, but that David was the best at his genre - at

songs and psalms. And Solomon was the best at wise sayings. So this rises to that level. As good as Solomon. Because, as you flip through this wisdom book, there are more contributors than just the wisest king.

And the proverbs - those two line cryptic sayings that make up the bulk of this book of wisdom - circulated well before Solomon or anyone else wrote them down.

Each proverb reflects the lived experience and the hard learning of generations of folks who sought to follow God and gained some insight into doing what is right. Life lessons and stories are built into them.

Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day,  
or like vinegar poured on a wound,  
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

Better a dry crust with peace and quiet,  
than a house full of feasting, with strife.

If anyone loudly blesses their neighbour early in the morning,  
it will be taken as a curse.

And for something that seems like it was written for a time of social media and  
Twitter brawling:

Like who grabs a stray dog by the ears  
is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own.

**Proverbs were passed down and persisted in the community of faith because they ring true to our lived experience.**

Like little signposts that help others find their way in a world that can be confusing and disorienting, proverbs offers guidance and instruction for how to become wise rather than be a fool.

And so Proverbs is a patchwork quilt made by generations before us. Pieced together from different lives and experiences. Lessons learned. Faith lived. Wisdom earned. Insight gained. All with the intention of passing it onto the next generation. To share what has been learned so those coming after have a guide or at least won't make the same mistakes their ancestors did. But also that maybe they'll also share their love and fear of the Lord.

The opening of the book of Proverbs establishes the purpose and theme of what this wisdom book is all about:

for gaining wisdom and instruction  
for understanding  
for giving knowledge and discretion to the young  
for understanding the sayings and the riddles of the wise

If we move to quickly through this, we might walk away with the impression that seeking wisdom is just about getting the right kind of head-knowledge. Just memorize a few proverbs, learn to be smart and clever like Solomon, and you're wise. Easy. Done.

**But wisdom is more than head-knowledge. More than knowing the right answer, wisdom is *living* the right answer.**

Wisdom, in Hebrew, is hokmah. A word for wisdom that has more in common with our sense of skill and artistry rather than just knowing some facts.

Back in Exodus, when God was speaking to Moses about how his people should worship and live and make a new life for themselves after leaving Egypt, God told Moses that God had chosen a certain skilled labourer and artisan to be the one to design and build the Tabernacle, the place of God's presence with his people. And not only had God chosen a craftsman, a son of Uri of the tribe of Judah, God also filled him with the Spirit of God and with **hokmah**, understanding and knowledge, and with all kinds of skills so that this son of Uri and his fellow carpenters and sculptors and metal-workers would be able to craft and build and carve and put together the Tabernacle in a way pleasing to God.

**Wisdom as hokmah, isn't about how smart you are or clever or educated. Wisdom as hokmah is a discipline and a skill that one develops and learns just like an apprentice working under a master.**

Just like a master quilter isn't someone who only knows the names of patterns - and can tell the difference between a flying geese pattern and a log cabin one. A master quilter is someone who knows how to take a pile of thread and fabric and transform them through skill and discipline and hard work into a thing of beauty and warmth and value.

Wisdom takes effort and skill and practice and humility. And only a fool, according to Proverbs here, despises the hard work of wisdom and the discipline it requires.

And only a fool would try to go it alone.

Wisdom is learned from others and passed down in community. From one generation to the next. As one generation seeks to understand how to faithfully follow God's will in their own time, the next generation witnesses and learns what to do and what not to do. We become living examples of wise living for one another. Through our failures and our stumbling, as well as through our faithfulness and right steps.

**This is what we celebrate today and mark with Levi's baptism.**

We have witnessed the vows of Josh and Amy to raise up and instruct Levi in the ways of faith and following Jesus.

We have witnessed the hands of Levi's grandfather baptize him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And we all have stood up, as Levi's church family, his adopted siblings in Christ, and vowed to instruct and teach by our word and example how to fear the Lord and walk in a way pleasing to God.

This is the family where Levi will learn what wisdom looks like, as he grows up in his life of faith and love of God. Where we pass on what we have learned in the hope and trust that Levi will share our love and fear of the Lord and become a wise young man.

But at this font, we also hear once again the promises of God to God's people.  
Given to us in our baptism.

Just as God sent his Spirit on that son of Uri and gifted him with hokmah, with wisdom, for understanding how to build in a way that pleases God, so God gifts us with his Spirit, with wisdom, to learn and understand how to build our lives in a way that pleases God.

**Wisdom is not just about our efforts, but about the promise and gift of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives - renewing us, cleansing us, teaching us, guiding us, instructing us, disciplining us, and reshaping us more and more into the image of Jesus, who is our Wisdom.**

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of our journey as we seek to become a wise people, and the Holy Spirit is the one piecing us all together, taking up our worn patches and rough edges, and transforming it all with skill and wisdom into something beautiful to the glory and praise of our God.

Thanks be to God.

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As our response to the Word, I invite you to take out those pieces of paper you were given on your way into worship this morning...

We are going to create our own little book of wisdom as a gift for Levi on the day of his baptism. And because this little one is so young, you're all his elders and his wiser siblings, so it doesn't matter if you're 6 or 16 or 96, you have something to share with Levi about following and loving Jesus. (If you're worshipping at home this morning, grab a piece of paper and then send or email me your word of wisdom to me this week and I'll include it.)

Offer him a word of encouragement or blessing, your favourite verse, a line from your favourite hymn, or your very own proverb of wisdom, and let us practice passing on our faith and love and wisdom to the next generation.

We're going to take a few minutes in silence and I'll close us in prayer....