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 John 1:1-18  
 St. Anne's Episcopal Church  
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*True Wisdom*

What is wisdom? What does it mean to be wise? What does wisdom look like?

Pastor John Ortberg remembers how his teacher divided students up in his first grade class, "Teachers assigned students to reading groups based on how well they could read. They would name all the groups after birds so that everyone would feel equal, but you could always tell how well you were doing by what bird your group was named after. There were the Eagles, the Robins, and the Pigeons. The Pigeons were *not* reading *War and Peace*."

Jesus himself was a teacher, a good teacher, and our gospels tell us that sometimes his disciples were a whole group of Pigeons. They often missed the point. There is a story you may have heard before, but it makes me smile. "Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and gathering them around him, he taught them saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they who thirst for justice. Blessed are you when you are persecuted and when you suffer. Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven. Then Simon Peter said, "Do we have to write this down?" And James said, "Will this be on the test?" And John said, "The other disciples didn't have to learn this." And Matthew said, "Is it time to go home yet?" And Judas said, "What does this have to do with real life?" Then one of the Pharisees asked to see Jesus' lesson plan and inquired of Jesus his terminal objectives in the cognitive domain. And Jesus wept."

What does wisdom look like?

Today we celebrate Episcopal Schools. At St. Anne's we give thanks to God for two Episcopal Schools in particular, the Preschool for the Arts at St. Anne's, a ministry of St. Anne's Church, and the Saint Anne's School of Annapolis, which grew up at St. Anne's Church and then became its own school, a sister institution in Annapolis. Our celebration of Episcopal schools today gives us all a chance to celebrate and pray for those who teach and those who learn, in Episcopal schools, and outside of Episcopal schools. And we give thanks for our Episcopal heritage, a heritage that advocates for nurturing the whole human being, a heritage that says wisdom is important. Not just knowledge, not just academic achievement, important as that is, but wisdom.

What does it mean to be wise? What is true wisdom?

Our Gospel lesson this morning is those beautiful words about the Word of God, Word with a capital W, the Word that was with God, the Word that was God, the Word through whom all creation came to be. Another word for Word in this gospel is Wisdom, what the Greeks called *logos*, reason, and the Hebrews called Wisdom.

Lofty stuff – wisdom is – right? Imagine God's wisdom – the wisdom that brought all things into being, the power behind all that is, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent – all those other great big vocabulary-builder words. But listen to what the Gospel says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." God's almighty, all knowing Wisdom didn't stay high and lofty, untouchable and untouching. No – Wisdom became flesh and blood, vulnerable, present, down to earth, God with us. We know this Wisdom as Jesus Christ. Jesus – the Wisdom of God, walking around in sandals, eating with outcasts and sinners, calling fishermen and laborers to follow him, welcoming children and blessing them, talking theology not just in the Temple with the elders, but also about what God might be doing in the ordinary life of a woman at the town well in the heat of the day. He paid attention to people: especially the people others overlooked or avoided. He trusted that God was God, the all-compassionate one, the source of all light and life and love. He told people that they didn't have to worry about their lives because God knows even the number of hairs on your head, and not a sparrow falls from the sky but God knows about it. Eagles, robins, pigeons - - God loves them all. And won't the God who clothes the lilies of the field and the birds of the air also care for you – you, who are worth so much more than birds and flowers? God's Wisdom is known, not in ethereal, wispy,

disembodied thought, but in verbs -- actions: Notice, give, care. Love, thank, serve.

St. Paul would summarize wise living this way, “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God . . . No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12: 9-21).

God’s Wisdom came and dwelt among us and from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

One of the most important experiences of wisdom I have had came not directly from the Bible, but from someone steeped in the biblical tradition, a man of the church, a Presbyterian minister, who has since died, and was known by millions of people of all ages. The occasion was the graduation of my husband with his PhD from Marquette University in Milwaukee, when Mr. Rogers was the commencement speaker that year. He was addressing a crowd of thousands of students, proud parents, and grandparents, spouses, and PhD’s in every field, college presidents and deans. Addressing this intellectually impressive crowd, Mr. Rogers told us about someone who influences him greatly. He said, “This person has a job which many people might consider unglamorous and tediously mundane. He’s the locker room attendant in Pittsburgh where I swim each day. His name is Jeff. We recently celebrated Jeff’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary working at the pool – 25 years cleaning sinks and sorting towels and caring about everybody. For his anniversary, some of us regulars got him a cake and a book about New York because Jeff loves New York.

“Honk, honk, honk,” he says when he talks about it. And he loves to watch the “Today Show” with people lined up on the streets around Rockefeller Plaza.

“Well, a few weeks ago, I told Jeff about writing this commencement speech, and I asked him what he thought I should say. “Tell them to be glad to be who they are. They might get to be president or a teacher or a doctor or just themselves whoever they are. Everybody can do something.” And he went right back to scrubbing the showers.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, . . .” to appreciate our life – and do what we can so others might appreciate theirs.”

Mr. Rogers told us about how he chose his career and that it came, “after a lot of help from a lot of people[.] I’ll never forget the sense of wholeness I felt when I finally realized what, in fact, I really was: . . . I was someone who could use every single talent that had ever been given to me in the service of children (and their families).

“It’s a miracle,” he said, “when we finally discover whom we’re best equipped to serve, when we can best appreciate the unique life we’ve been given.”

True wisdom: when we discover whom we are best equipped to serve, when we appreciate the unique life we have been given.

May we all know true wisdom.