

**Circuit Zoom Service for Sunday 29th January 2022, the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Prepared
by the Revd. Alan Haine**

Call to Worship: We come this morning, not because we are able by our own right, but because we know our need of God. We come, not because we are able by our own deeds, but because we know we are summoned in God's love. We come in our need and in our hope. We come because of all that God has done and we come in thanksgiving to the God whose wisdom is so much greater than we can ever imagine, yet who never ceases to love us.

**Hymn: 82 (Singing the Faith) O Lord my God
Or 28 (Hymns & Psalms) O worship the King!**

[WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL-HOW GREAT THOU ART - YouTube](#)

<p>1 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath made, I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed : <i>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee : how great thou art, how great thou art ! Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee : how great thou art, how great thou art !</i></p> <p>2 When through the woods and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees ; when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze :</p>	<p>3 And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin :</p> <p>4 When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home — what joy shall fill my heart ; then shall I bow in humble adoration, and there proclaim : my God, how great thou art :</p> <p>Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989) vv. 1, 2, 4 based on <i>O store Gud</i> 1885by Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859–1940)</p>
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession:

Lord God our Father, how great You are! And so we come before You now in humility and awe, for You are the one who has made the entire universe and who has given life to us and to all Your creatures. Your wisdom is beyond our understanding and Your majesty can never be put into mere human words.

All we can do as we reflect on the wonder of Your greatness is to bow before You in humble adoration. And the most amazing thing of all is that, although You are so powerful and so wise, yet You still love and care for each one of us.

We praise You now that You sent Jesus to this world to embody not only Your supreme wisdom, but also Your almighty love. We ask that as we worship now, we may come to understand more of that wisdom and that love. Indeed we pray that we may not just understand them, but actually take them to our hearts and be changed by them.

For we confess that so often in the past we have acted as though our own human wisdom was all that we needed. We have acted as though we had all the answers and did not need Your help. Again and again we have been content with our shallow human love which has not been able to withstand the hardest tests, causing us to fail in our care for others and in our devotion to You.

Forgive us, Father, and help us to begin all over again. As we share together in worship and fellowship may we truly feast on Jesus Christ and be given His grace to see the world as He sees it and to love each other as He loves us. We ask all this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Declaration of Forgiveness: The Lord Jesus says to each one of us, “Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more.” **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

The Lord's Prayer

Reflection: It's Not What You Know but Who You Know that Matters.

I have a very useful dictionary, actually a Collins English Dictionary. I've had it for many years now, but it's very useful when doing crosswords and quizzes because it not only tells you word meanings but all sorts of facts including short details about famous people, places and events. There are thousands of words in it. I wonder if anyone watching this talk would claim to know all the words in it? For example:

“tarsometatarsus”. It sounds to me as if it might be some sort of prehistoric animal like a dinosaur, but in fact it is a bone in the lower part of a bird's leg.

Or what about “nosology”. Could that be the study of noses? No, it is “the branch of medicine concerned with the classification of diseases”.

It may be that some of you clever clogs knew one or both of those words, but for myself I know there are millions of words that I don't know and if I tried to remember all the words in the Dictionary, I would never manage it.

Here's another book: the Bible. I wonder if any of you like me have ever had to learn verses from the Bible by heart? Is there any one of you who claims to know the whole Bible off by heart, so that if I called out any verse you would be able to tell me it at once? If I said Isaiah 27, verse 2, for example, who could tell me what that says?

No, I should be very surprised if anyone could ever do that, although in Jesus' time they did learn whole books of the Old Testament by heart because they didn't have printed Bibles and they didn't have entertainment easily available like we do today. There were no televisions, radios, computers, i-pods or mobile phones and so they had more time to try to remember things by heart.

But I don't think that even someone with a wonderful memory would ever have been able to learn the whole Old Testament by heart. I don't think we should worry about that because there's a saying that some of you may have heard: “It's not what you know that matters, but who you know”.

Sometimes that is not a good thing and it is not always true, but when it comes to Christian faith it is very true. It's good to read our Bibles and know them well, but we can never remember all the details and all the names. What matters far more is that we come to know who the Bible is all about: God our Father and His Son Jesus Christ. And the good news is that we can come to know them not just as names, but as living friends. If we don't already know Jesus as our Friend and as our Lord and Saviour, the one who is at the centre of everything, then we can ask God our Father to help us to discover that.

In our service today we are going to think about what real wisdom means and actually real wisdom involves having Jesus as our Friend and Guide. In the end it is not the information we know from the Bible that matters so much, but knowing Jesus as our friend, the one who is with us every step we take in our lives to help us and encourage us.

Hymn: 476 (Singing the Faith)/746 (Hymns & Psalms) One more step

[BBC songs of praise - One More Step Along The World I Go - YouTube](#)

<p>1 One more step along the world I go, one more step along the world I go ; from the old things to the new keep me travelling along with you : <i>and it's from the old I travel to the new ; keep me travelling along with you.</i></p> <p>2 Round the corners of the world I turn, more and more about the world I learn ; all the new things that I see you'll be looking at along with me :</p> <p>3 As I travel through the bad and good, keep me travelling the way I should ; where I see no way to go you'll be telling me the way, I know :</p>	<p>4 Give me courage when the world is rough, keep me loving though the world is tough ; leap and sing in all I do, keep me travelling along with you :</p> <p>5 You are older than the world can be, you are younger than the life in me ; ever old and ever new, keep me travelling along with you :</p> <p>Sydney Carter (1915–2004)</p>
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Introduction to Lesson: In one of the greatest of all passages in the prophets, God challenges His people to see that there is nothing that they can do to earn God's favour. Instead they must simply accept what He gives as they do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with their God. For Micah, that is the truly wise way to live.

Responsive Reading: Psalm 15 (New Revised Standard Version)

Introduction to Reading: The Psalmist indicates what he regards as the wise way to live, a way very close to that suggested by Micah. But those who follow this way often find it leads to a cross, for true wisdom is not easily won.

The Psalm:

Leader: O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

People: **Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart;**

Leader: Who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbours;

People: **In whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honour those who fear the Lord;**

Leader: Who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

People: **Who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent.**

Leader & People: **Those who do these things shall never be moved.**

NT Lesson: I Corinthians 1, verses 18 to 31

Introduction to Lesson: Some people reject the cross of Christ as foolishness, but Paul insists that the cross enshrines the true wisdom and genuine power of God.

Hymn: 500 (Singing the Faith)/674 (Hymns & Psalms) Happy are they who find the grace/Happy the man that finds the grace

[Happy the Man Who Finds the Grace - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Happy are they who find the grace, the blessing of God's chosen race, the wisdom coming from above, the faith that sweetly works by love.</p> <p>2 Happy beyond description we, who say 'the Saviour died for me,' the gift unspeakable obtain, and heavenly understanding gain.</p> <p>3 Wisdom divine ! Who tells the price of wisdom's costly merchandise ? Wisdom to silver we prefer, and gold is dross compared to her.</p>	<p>4 Her hands are filled with length of days, true riches, and immortal praise, riches of Christ, on all bestowed, and honour that descends from God.</p> <p>5 To purest joys she all invites, chaste, holy, spiritual delights ; her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her flowery paths are peace.</p> <p>6 Happy are they who wisdom gain, thrice happy who that guest retain ; they own, and shall for ever own, wisdom, and Christ, and heaven are one.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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Gospel: St. Matthew 5, verses 1 to 12

Introduction to Lesson: The familiar Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount reflect the lives of those who base their existence on the wisdom of God rather than on ordinary human wisdom and who, above all else, have founded their lives on love.

Sermon: The Wisdom of the Humble

If I began my sermon today by saying that I wanted to share with you my attitude to epistemology and hermeneutics, I expect that most of you wouldn't know what on earth I was talking about and, to be honest, I wouldn't either. It would sound as though I had swallowed that dictionary I was using earlier in the service.

Now I imagine that all of us would agree that the task of the preacher is to make the message of the Bible as clear as possible and that we expect what the preacher says to be something that we can understand and that helps us to grow in faith. So I was completely perplexed when I was a minister in Bristol 40 years ago now and heard about a clergyman who seemed to believe that preachers should actually try to be as difficult to understand as possible. One of the churches in which I served was an ecumenical church in which there was almost total sharing between Anglicans and Methodists. One of the Anglican members, Peggy, was training to be a Reader (i.e. the Anglican equivalent of a Local Preacher). She used to preach not just in our Anglican-Methodist church, but in all the Methodist churches of our Circuit and she was always very warmly welcomed because she was always well-prepared, spoke from the heart and in a way that was easy to follow. Yet this man in charge of her studies told her and the rest of the training group that they should fill their sermons with long and difficult words and generally make themselves as hard to understand as they could. I just could not believe this when I first heard it and wondered if he was joking, but from what Peggy told me, it was plain that he was deadly serious. Fortunately Peggy took no notice of him, but I wonder what inspired him to take this very strange line. My only conclusion is that he had totally misunderstood what real wisdom is all about, falsely imagining that true wisdom always involves being highly intellectual and talking as far above other peoples' heads as is humanly possible. I know that sometimes when we preachers use illustrations, you in the congregation cannot always see the link between the illustration and the point we are making, but by and large illustrations from ordinary life help to make the meaning clearer and you would expect preachers to want to make their message as clear as possible. I think that Jesus Himself tried to do the same and that that is why He used so many stories and illustrations from everyday life which would help people to understand His meaning.

But some of the Greek thinkers in the time of St. Paul would have agreed with that clergyman who tried to make things harder to follow. Probably some of those were to be found in Corinth and Paul's readers there would have come across their view that real wisdom is concerned with things that are very difficult to understand. Apparently they attacked Paul because his message about the cross of Jesus was too simple and too straightforward. It couldn't be truly wise because it was too easy to follow. They wanted something with lots of long words and difficult ideas and, if Paul had preached in that way, they would have been far more interested in what he had to say.

But Paul was quite clear that the wisdom these Greeks favoured was an empty wisdom and was of no use compared to the true wisdom contained in Jesus Christ and His Cross. It's all too easy for some modern Christians to be ruled by their heads instead of their hearts and to complicate the message of Jesus by dressing it up in long words and obscure terms. Don't get me wrong: I am not saying that we Christians should leave our brains behind when we come to church or when we read the Bible. The sentry Private Willis outside the House of Commons in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta "Iolanthe" notes that the MPs have to leave "their brains outside and vote just how their leaders tell 'em to".

We don't have to do that as Christians and we should use our intellect to understand what we believe. If our faith will not stand up to scrutiny, then we need to change it. But that does not mean that we should on purpose make our faith obscure and hard to follow.

And at the heart of our faith, as Paul saw so clearly, is the wisdom of the Cross—a wisdom that is in one sense all too easy to understand as we see in our mind's eye Christ dying in love for us and for all the world. Yet it is not so easy for us to take that wisdom and put it into practice in our own lives.

Perhaps that is why some Christians try to make the message of Jesus more complicated than it really is because that gives them an excuse for not actually putting the message into practice.

But, as St. Paul saw so clearly, the ones who have truly grasped the wisdom of God shown in the cross of Christ have usually been from the world's point of view humble and unimportant--not the rich and famous and powerful, but the ones the world has overlooked or even thought to be foolish and of no value.

When the wise men came seeking a King, they found him not at King Herod's court, as they had expected, but in a much humbler setting in a house at Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph. The first followers of Jesus were, for the most part, not the leaders of society, but those from far less exalted backgrounds, fishermen and even political revolutionaries like Simon the Zealot. Certainly in Corinth, from what we know from Paul's letters, most of the church were slaves or little better than that. Yet it was then and still is today to people who have no pretensions and no desire to be intellectual that the true wisdom of God most often comes. Indeed in our Gospel reading from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' Beatitudes seem to be making a similar point: that those closest to God are not usually the great and mighty in the eyes of the world, but those who have chosen the wisdom of the Kingdom of God, even when that wisdom seems to go clean

counter to common sense and the general way that most people look at life.

Worldly wisdom has no time for meekness and humility: it says you must never let anybody ride roughshod over you and your rights. But Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth". Worldly wisdom has little use for mercy, imagining that if you forgive somebody they will never learn their lesson, but Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

Worldly wisdom is all in favour of being aggressive and putting other people in their place, but Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

To the worldly wise, the cross of Jesus is nonsense and they imagine that there is nothing worse than showing yourself vulnerable or having to suffer, but Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

And Jesus not only proclaims that truth, but lives it out by the way in which He Himself is put on trial and made vulnerable as He is mocked and abused and finally crucified.

What a great mystery we have here, yet it is the mystery at the very heart of existence: that the true wisdom of God is found not in a God who orders people around and who is very much in the driving seat, but in a God who becomes vulnerable and weak and even dies on a Cross. Jesus seems to be saying to us that if we would find true wisdom, we should not try to put on airs by using long words and complicated ideas. Nor should we try to be great and powerful in a worldly sense by being those who seek to achieve great fame and fortune. On the contrary, like Jesus we need to be humble and unassuming, even being ready to be vulnerable.

In our Old Testament Lesson the prophet Micah was on the right track when he suggested that what God requires is that we do justice, love kindness and, above all, walk humbly with our God.

The Israelites in Micah's time were so keen to achieve great things by a mighty wisdom so that through those achievements they might win their own salvation, but when they did that, they only succeeded in getting further and further away from God. In the passage we heard, the prophet even questions the value of sacrifices which were so much a part of the Israelite religion. For Micah, those sacrifices suggested yet again that men and women could achieve their own salvation and work out their own wisdom without reference to God. But in the end the true wisdom comes from being truly humble and allowing God to work in us rather than trying to achieve great things in our own strength. Yes, real wisdom comes when we refuse to press forward our own claims to greatness and instead simply allow God to use us in the humble ways He chooses.

Just before a new Archbishop of Canterbury was appointed over 20 years ago now several of the newspapers were running campaigns against some of the possible candidates for the post. The suggestion was made that some of the candidates were trying to drum up their own chances of appointment, often by spreading bad publicity about some of the other candidates. I don't know if that was true and I hope it wasn't, but I was intrigued to see an article in the paper at that time suggesting that it would be far more Christian to give the job of Archbishop of Canterbury to an ordinary parish priest who had no pretensions to be famous, but who was simply trying to put the faith into practice. I have a lot of sympathy with that point of view, although it may be too idealistic. Part of me wonders if when it comes to appointing the President of the Methodist Conference each year it should be done not by a vote but by lot, so that the person is appointed not because of any campaign or pressure group. Certainly in New Testament times that was how they appointed church leaders, although if we did that I suppose we might end up with someone who wasn't the greatest preacher, theologian or administrator.

Yet whatever you think about that, surely in our own lives we must each try to see more clearly where true wisdom lies. I have no doubt that wherever else wisdom may be found, it is definitely at work in the cross of Jesus Christ. If we want a wisdom that works in the heart and not just in the head, then we must take in what we find at the cross. Indeed, as we think about what was involved in the death of Jesus, may we take to our hearts that loving wisdom which Jesus brings: the loving wisdom which puts God at the centre and which swallows up our own desire for greatness and power in love--love for God and love for our fellows.

I don't know about you, but that is the sort of wisdom which I can at least begin to understand and that speaks to me with a directness I find nowhere else. So let us take this wisdom that God offers us in His Son Jesus and let us be satisfied with nothing else.

Hymn: 501 (Singing the Faith)/474 (Hymns & Psalms) Help us, O Lord, to learn
[Help us O Lord to learn - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths your word imparts, to study that your laws may be inscribed upon our hearts.</p> <p>2 Help us, O Lord, to live the faith which we proclaim, that all our thoughts and words and deeds may glorify your name.</p>	<p>3 Help us, O Lord, to teach the beauty of your ways, that all who seek may find the Christ, and make a life of praise.</p> <p>William Watkins Reid (b. 1923)</p>
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Prayers of Intercession & Thanksgiving:

Leader: Lord, may we and all people find the true wisdom:

People: **The wisdom that lies in Christ and His Cross.**

Leader: Lord God, as we see and hear the news, we see so much folly at work in the world: the folly of war and conflict such as that in Ukraine where so many innocent people are pointlessly dying and suffering; the folly of selfishness as the richer nations and the richer people within each nation have so much whilst others have so little; the folly of human failure to combat global warming so that human beings, animals and the whole natural world suffer and the world's future is put in danger.

We ask that world leaders and all those with influence may come to recognize this folly and begin to seek for more wisdom in the way they rule, a wisdom that You have shown us so clearly in Your Son.

Leader: Lord, may we and all people find the true wisdom:

People: **The wisdom that lies in Christ and His Cross.**

Leader: Then we bring to You the local Church to which we belong, our Circuit and indeed all Christians everywhere in the world. We ask that all those who profess to follow Jesus may truly seek to go along the way of the Cross, even when that is hard and involves sacrifice.

May we and all Christians constantly take to heart more of the wisdom of Christ and so be able to show more of His love to those we meet:

Leader: Lord, may we and all people find the true wisdom:

People: **The wisdom that lies in Christ and His Cross.**

Leader: Then, Lord, we bring to You those we know who are sick and sad. We bring to You especially those known personally to us (*names may be mentioned*).

We ask that You will be especially near to those who cannot see any wisdom in what is happening to them or their loved ones and who may even feel that You are far away from them. Help us to stay close to them and support them and by our love to seek to bring them through and enable them to see that You are with them, just as You were with Jesus in His suffering.

Leader: Lord, may we and all people find the true wisdom:

People: **The wisdom that lies in Christ and His Cross.**

Leader: Finally, we pray for ourselves: for the places we will visit and the people we will meet during the next week. We pray that in every situation we may discover more of Your wisdom as we work with all those of good will to enrich our local area and make it a happier place.

As we offer You our gifts of money, either money presented now or money that has been paid in other ways, we remember how our Lord Jesus offered to the world all He had in humility and in love. May we seek to follow His example and so show what it means to be really wise.

Leader: Lord, may we and all people find the true wisdom:

People: **The wisdom that lies in Christ and His Cross.**

Leader: We bring all our prayers in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn:

or 492 (Singing the Faith)/709 (Hymns & Psalms) Christ, be my leader

(786 (Hymns & Psalms) Be it my only wisdom here)

[Christ Be My Leader - HBBC Youth Choir - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Christ be my leader by night as by day ; safe through the darkness, for he is the way. Gladly I follow, my future his care, darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.</p> <p>2 Christ be my teacher in age as in youth, drifting or doubting, for he is the truth. Grant me to trust him ; though shifting as sand, doubt cannot daunt me ; in Jesus I stand.</p>	<p>3 Christ be my Saviour in calm as in strife ; death cannot hold me, for he is the life. Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain can touch my salvation ; with Jesus I reign.</p> <p>Timothy Dudley-Smith (<i>b.</i> 1926)</p>
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The Blessing: Let us go out to follow the true wisdom as we put the love of God and the love of neighbour before everything else; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit remain with us always. **Amen.**