

Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
6th Sunday of Thanksgiving, November 14, 2021
(Proverbs 2:1-11, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9)
“The Problem with Knowledge” by Rev. Sue Trigger

The Book of Proverbs 2:1-11

My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments within you,
² making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
³ if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
⁴ if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures--
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,
⁸ guarding the paths of justice
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
¹¹ prudence will watch over you;
and understanding will guard you.

The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 1:4-9

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – ⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – ⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today's letter of the word thanks is K for knowledge, so I thought I would share some little known facts with you...

--Did you know that a West Virginia man once escaped from jail by using a rope made out of dental floss?

--that a kangaroo jumped a pile of lumber 10 1/2 feet high and 27 feet long?

--that Englishman John Evans kept 66 bricks, weighing a total of 296 pounds, balanced on his head for 10 seconds, a world record?

--that Iceland consumes more Coca-Cola per person than any other country in the world?

--that you can sing "Amazing Grace" to the tune of the theme song from Gilligan's Island?

--that Heinz ketchup, poured from the mouth of an upended bottle, travels at an average speed of 25 miles per year?

Now, don't you feel more knowledgeable? ⁱ

In our society, when we speak of "knowledge," it is almost always synonymous with "information." A very knowledgeable person is someone who has a lot of information about a subject. In our passage today from Proverbs, knowledge is highly prized, but it's also clear that there is more to knowledge than just information. Here "knowledge" goes hand in hand with "wisdom." Some of you may remember we talked about the importance of wisdom in August when we looked at the story of King Solomon in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs emphasizes the connection between knowledge and wisdom by repeating different words that are linked to them like insight, understanding, righteousness, justice, equity, and prudence.

You may recall that right after he was made king of Israel, Solomon went to worship God at Gibeon. This was a well-known high place of worship and very important, especially because the Temple had not yet been built. He made a sacrifice to God then fell asleep and in a dream, God said to him, "Ask what I should give you." The author, Walter Wangerin, points out that Solomon did not ask for wealth or long life, but for something much more valuable. He asked for "an understanding heart," which translated from the Hebrew, means "a hearing heart." There is certainly wisdom in that. Solomon understood that wisdom is the ability to open a room in one's heart for the presence--of another. So there are two things we can know about wisdom from Solomon. One, it is connected to our relationships with others and two, opening one's heart includes the ability to listen. Knowledge and wisdom go hand in hand, but they are not the same thing.

Hank, a landscape contractor, had his first full-fledged job. Of course he didn't want to appear to be an amateur he knew he was, so he feigned a casual kind of nonchalance and expertise. One of the first tasks he had to tackle was blasting out some stumps with dynamite for a farmer. Since the farmer was watching he went to some length to measure out the fuses and carefully set the dynamite-- as if he really knew what he was doing. The only problem was he really didn't know how much dynamite he needed to do the job.

When he was all set up he took a look at his work and breathed a prayer that he had enough dynamite packed under each stump, and yet not too much to blow them all to kingdom come. Hank looked at the farmer with a knowing look of what he hoped came across as confidence and pushed down the plunger. A stump rose high in the air with a resounding boom and arched magnificently over towards his pickup truck and landed right on the roof, demolishing it.

The farmer turned to Hank and said, "Son, you didn't miss it by much--just a few feet. With a bit more practice you'll be able to land those suckers in the truck bed every time." ⁱⁱ He needed a bit more knowledge, don't you think?

Christianity has long debated the need for knowledge and wisdom. For some, faith demands a "sacrifice of the intellect," the belief being that faith is purer when we fully trust God and don't ask questions. There is always value in putting more trust in God, but the writer of Proverbs challenged that perspective saying, "fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), the twentieth century pastor and theologian who was killed for his opposition to Hitler, helps to reconcile these two views. He wrote: **"The best-informed man is not necessarily the wisest. Indeed there is a danger that precisely in the multiplicity of his knowledge he will lose sight of what is essential. But on the other hand, knowledge of an apparently trivial detail quite often makes it possible to see into the depth of things. And so the wise man will seek to acquire the best possible knowledge about events, but always without becoming dependent upon this knowledge. To recognize the significant in the factual is wisdom."**

Wisdom is something that grows with knowledge and experience. It also requires that we open our hearts to others, and that we listen to one another. A French proverb says that "Wisdom is to the soul what health is to the body." We need to add one more important aspect to Wisdom; it also includes our knowledge of God. The open heart and listening that we are to extend to each other we must also extend to God. In other words, we need to try to understand how God wants us to act at any given moment. Sound simple? But if you've ever tried to discern what God desires for you, you know it can be quite difficult. The book of Proverbs can help us. It says that wisdom is knowing what the right thing is to *do*; wisdom is never being absolutely certain that we know what *is* right. Wisdom is being open to God's guidance, looking to find the ways that God can speak to us in our lives. It is, as Wangerin wrote, having a "hearing heart." For us, Jesus was the best revelation of God, and so to know him is to know God. As Mitch reminded us last week, the name Christian means "little Christ" and reminds us that we are to seek to live by the knowledge and wisdom Jesus showed us.

Why do we include this "knowledge of God" in our Thanksgiving season? Because the knowledge of God is foundational to faith. The more we understand about the loving character of God, the more we understand how to live with each other and how to value each other. The person with a healthy realization of the limits of his or her own knowledge is the person that will listen to what others have to say with respect. The person with a belief in God's justice will not be selfish, but generous. When we exhibit this knowledge, we will be the kind of people who are a joy to live with and be friends with and to be around. We will be the kind of people who,

because they give respect and value to others, receive it in return. This is the kind of person that Proverbs tells us God wants us to be. We also know this because Jesus was that kind of person.

As Christ's community, may we listening to each other, respect the viewpoints of others—and do all we do with the wisdom that comes from our knowledge of God. May we be a place where people can grow in the knowledge of God through our actions, and may we be a community of blessings, for as it is written in Proverbs, "The Lord blesses the abode of the righteous."

ⁱ -- "Strange World," *Campus Life*, Vol. 53, no. 6.

ⁱⁱ --James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 317.