



Memorial Garden Evensong
September 2020

Wisdom 3:1; Psalm 84; Matthew 5:1

The Wisdom of Solomon is a book that presents the idea that what our senses teach us may not reflect reality as fully as we are inclined to believe. This idea shares something with quantum physics. Is there anything stable in our concrete world? Can we know anything with certainty? The past six months have raised similar questions for us all. What can we know with absolute confidence, so that we need not fear that the rug will be pulled out from beneath our feet?

The author explores large ideas: life, death, righteousness, wisdom; placing them all within the providence of a loving God. The awareness that God creates, sustains, and brings to perfection, the whole creation, allows us to come to a state of peace and joy, which Jesus describes as being a state of *blessedness*. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Matt 5:8 This state of blessedness begins in the knowledge that God loses nothing that He has made; and leads to the subsequent understanding that everything has value and purpose because nothing lies outside God's loving good will.

This is true for all creation, and for all people. *Though in the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction; [yet] they are in peace.*

Our senses teach us one thing, but wisdom teaches us another. Everyone has value and purpose in God, who perfects what He has made when He brings all things back to Himself. This perfecting, the author says, is like gold that is purified by fire. Impurities fall away, and what remains shines like the purifying fire itself.

God is in control from beginning to end; He has only a loving good will toward us, and will ultimately purify us in His Son, so that we will share His divine life. That is the state of blessedness – of bliss.

Our senses may lead us to such an understanding of God's providence, but in this uncertain world they can equally lead us to think other alternatives possible. The death of family members and friends, especially if they should come in quick succession, or in conjunction with other afflictions, put a significant strain on our ability to trust that God is in control, or that He cares.

And yet, generation after generation, the goodness of God reveals itself to people in sorrow. The reality that we are created for a greater purpose and for greater joy than this world affords, impresses itself upon people when they recognize that we are not self-sufficient, but depend upon God, and upon others, to find purpose, fulfilment, joy, and peace. This realization seems to come to us most readily, when we mourn the loss of loved ones.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3

Jesus is saying quite simply that the first step toward wisdom, toward blessedness, is to recognize that we belong to one another and to God. We cannot find our true value and purpose by looking only to ourselves.

John Donne puts it this way:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

One of the purposes of this service is to help us recognize the truth of what Donne says so well. We belong to each other, and to God, in this world, and in the next. And in some way our grief at loss teaches us this most clearly. We grieve

physically, as well as spiritually, because we are both body and soul; we belong to this world and the next.

And for this reason we remain connected with *those whom we love, but see no longer*, right through *the grave and gate of death*. We remain connected with those who now know more perfectly than we, the state of blessedness, for which purpose God creates us.

And they remain connected with us, concerned about us, and about our welfare. They continue to love us, because they now know the depth of God's love for us, and the purpose for which He created us. They know it, not by their senses, nor by any earthly knowledge, but by Love.

Ultimately, love is the one certainty that provides the solid ground which cannot be shaken. God's love creates us; Christ's love redeems us; and the love of the Holy Spirit draws us together with one another, and into the life of God Himself.

Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding great joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Jude vv24f

Amen.