

**Sermon Notes from CMJ**  
12th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

**RCL Readings** – 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

**ACNA Readings** – Proverbs 9:1-6, Psalm 147, Ephesians 5:3-14, John 6:51-58

**Introduction.** How do we know someone to be a wise person? Our iPhones do not come with a wise-person detection app. It usually takes time and experience with someone to learn if they have the quality of wisdom. Jesus says that ‘Wisdom is known by her children’ (Luke 7:35). The word ‘children’ is most likely a Hebraism for ‘fruit’, thus we discern a wise person to be someone with wise actions.

**Common Theme.** Wisdom is our common theme today, aside from the Gospel portion, which continues the teaching of Jesus on the Bread of Life. We are encouraged in the Scriptures to ‘get wisdom’ (Prov 4:5). We should endeavour to be wiser tomorrow than we are today. Possessing wisdom is not the end goal, however. There is no prize for having the most wisdom when Jesus returns. Instead, as this week’s readings suggest, applying wisdom is truly the art of the wise.

**1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14.** Our passage in Kings presents some biographical history of Solomon, the ‘man of wisdom’. David departs this world to rest with his ancestors, and Solomon ascends the throne at a young age. His exact age is not known. Solomon describes himself as ‘only a little child’ in verse 7, although this could be referring to his experience of governorship and not age. Solomon was evidently old enough to marry as in the text prior to today’s passage he entered into a marriage alliance with the Egyptian daughter of Pharaoh.

Solomon’s ascent to the throne of David is a good illustration of God’s forgiveness and an example of how the Lord makes things right. Solomon’s name *שְׁלֹמֹה* (Shlomo) comes from the verb ‘*shalem*’ and carries with it the meanings of wholeness, paid in full, and peace. David’s sin with Bathsheba was forgiven and now Solomon, out of all the children from all the wives of David, will continue the line of the House of David. Solomon had learnt some things of the Lord from his father, however, he continued to worship at the ‘high places’. While there was no temple in Jerusalem at that time, the Ark of the Covenant was present in David’s tent. Despite this, Solomon journeys to Gibeon, a Levitical city in Judah and ‘principal high place’ (v 4), for his customary worship. 1 Chronicles 16:39-40 adds that the Tabernacle and an altar had been established at Gibeon.

God speaks in a dream to Solomon at Gibeon and not in Jerusalem, as one might have expected. There are very few dream scenes in the Bible. You can almost count on one hand how many times God communicates to his heroes through dreams. It was more common to have the Lord speak through a prophet than a personal dream, although Solomon is the only monarch in the Hebrew Bible who has no accompanying prophet. The Lord offers Solomon a boon, and Solomon asks for an ‘understanding heart’. In Hebrew, it reads ‘*lev shemea*’ or a ‘heart that hears’. Real wisdom hears from the Lord. Solomon will contribute much of the wisdom literature that we have in the Bible, such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs 4:5 Solomon will encourage us to ‘get wisdom’. From where should we get

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this wisdom? Not to disparage modern education, but however smart we think we are, modern technology cannot solve the world's problems. True wisdom comes from heaven (Jas 3:17), and we all need open hearts to hear.

**Psalm 111.** Psalm 111 is an unattributed song of praise that encourages us to worship the Lord with our whole heart. Solomon had asked for a heart that hears the Lord, and part of our worship of God is also listening to him. The psalm is personal, 'I will give thanks', but it is also communal, 'in the assembly of the upright'. The opening word 'Hallelujah' is an imperative, meaning the worshiper is urging others to also worship. If we want others to praise God then we should set the example and go first! Worship can be both in private and in public as we are encouraged to worship in the congregation of the upright. A drug-infested nightclub is probably not the best place to worship God. Praise is directed to God and reflects on the amazing things he has done. The deeds of the Lord are not unseen; they are visible and 'studied'. In truth, it would be difficult to praise the Lord for his wondrous works had he not actually done anything nor performed his works openly for people to see. Likewise, our own deeds should also be seen. As Jesus says, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to God'. All of the awesome works of the Lord should bring us to a place of awe, wonder, and healthy respect. This attitude, described as fear, is the beginning of wisdom. Fear is not the terrified emotion of horror but the healthy reverence and awe induced by observing the actions of God and recognizing his greatness in the things we can see. Who demonstrates good understanding, asks the psalmist? Those who act accordingly! It's great to hear from the Lord; it's wonderful to witness miracles and God's power, but true wisdom does not sit idle. Wisdom is not an intellectual achievement; it is connected to a relationship with God that results in appropriate action.

**Ephesians 5:15-20.** The 'days are evil', says Paul, and perhaps for many it would seem that things have not changed all that much since the first century. How then should we live? Wisdom is not simply an esoteric principle of the mind. Biblically, wisdom is very much something practical. How should we walk? 'Carefully', writes Paul, who contrasts between acting wisely and foolishly while making the 'most of our time'. In Paul's epistles, there is a sense of the imminent return of Jesus, and Paul would urge us to take present opportunities to walk in light and love and to win many for Christ. Wisdom is connected to understanding the will of the Lord. Foolishness is the opposite of wisdom and thus cannot understand God's will and engages in deeds of darkness. Paul specifically singles out the imbibing of too much wine. Judaism has a healthy respect for the proper use of wine as the 'fruit of the vine' is used in most religious feasts and festivals. Psalm 104:15 says wine 'gladdens the heart', and wine is often used as a blessing to God, particularly on the Sabbath. Perhaps Paul was thinking of the Greco-Roman deity Dionysius, whose worship would sometimes involve drunkenness and orgies. He did not want the Gentile believers behaving in a similar fashion during community worship times. None of us would assume the will of the Lord to be debauchery during worship. Proper behaviour in worship included Spirit-filled praise and singing, with melodies occurring within our hearts — hearts that hear the word of

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the Lord! We should not only behave during worship but also in the life we lead outside of community gatherings.

**John 6:51-58.** ‘I am the living bread’ is one of the seven ‘I am’ statements by Jesus. Bread as a metaphor is a powerful image, as bread is an essential food element for many cultures (and takes many forms such as loaves, thin laffa, nan, and Middle Eastern pita). Bread can have religious use as at Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The ‘showbread’ served as a perpetual memorial in the Temple. Humans can survive solely on bread and water for quite some time, however, Moses had already declared that we should not ‘live by bread alone’ but by the word of the Lord (Deut 8:3). The things of the earth will always remain on this earth, and none of it can be taken into the world to come. The context of Jesus’ statement is in the tension between human food, including the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, and spiritual food, between the things that perish and fade and the eternal things that last forever. What lasts? Jesus does, and in his love, he says he will share his everlasting life with the world.

Since the miracle of feeding the five thousand, Jesus has been teaching us to move our focus from material things to spiritual realities. Jesus boldly states that in contrast to any physical bread that has come before, including the heavenly bread known as manna, he is the true life-giving sustenance. He is the life that lasts forever. Jesus explains that the bread he is talking about is his flesh. This has attracted much attention and commentary as to his intended meaning. Declaring that people should ‘eat flesh and drink blood’ was and is incredibly radical and offensive to many people, especially many of the Jewish hearers of Jesus. In the Christian world, whole denominations have been spawned over the literalness of eating and drinking the body and blood of the Lord. Regardless of our particular understanding of the Eucharist, the invitation of the Lord to partake of his eternal life through his body and blood is the same. We have the promise by Jesus that we will partake of his resurrection on the last day and that the life we live with him even now will be a life that lasts forever.

### **ACNA Addendum**

**Proverbs 9:1-6.** Proverbs 8 and 9 personify wisdom as a woman (so too the counterpart known as ‘folly’). Interestingly, wisdom is described in the plural, wisdoms. Wisdom is described as being very active. She constructs a dwelling and prepares a meal, sending out invitations to come and participate in the banquet. Bread and wine are metaphors here for the entire meal. Solomon, the author of Proverbs, encourages us to feast on spiritual things and not only physical food. Wisdom is not passive, as many of today’s readings demonstrate. We should actively walk in the way of understanding. Having learnt something of God and of his will, our response should be to internalize that knowledge in our hearts and put our understanding into action.

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**Psalm 147.** Psalm 147 is one of several psalms that begin and end with the word ‘hallelujah’. The final five psalms in the book of Psalms all share this characteristic. There is no title nor is there an author attributed to its creation. The word *hallelujah* is an imperative, calling us to praise God. An imperative is an exhortation or command, such as saying to someone, “Sit” or “Stand up!” It is not inconceivable that during the Temple service the conductor of worship would shout ‘Hallelujah’, and the worshippers present would then respond to the instruction and begin praising the Lord. The psalm begins by stating how good it is to praise the Lord and proceeds to describe many reasons why we should actually do so. Some of those reasons include the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the return of Israel, the wonders of Creation, and God’s concern for the poor. Praise of the Lord is linked to his work and actions. God is known through his actions, as are those who have heard his voice and responded. They will know that we are Christians by our acts of love!

**Ephesians 5:3-14.** The Greco-Roman culture condoned a level of indecency, idolatry, and sexual immorality. One could easily argue that after 2,000 years very little has changed. Paul groups together a collection of immoral behaviour and describes this behaviour as so inappropriate that those who do these things have no ‘inheritance in the Kingdom’. That is, their behaviour reveals the complete lack of both inward and outward transformation that would be found in a follower of Jesus. Paul is not saying that Christians are sinless but rather, as followers of the Messiah, we should not try to excuse or minimize sin, nor be active, wilful partakers of sinful behaviour. Paul writes that formerly we ‘were once darkness’ (v 8 NIV). He doesn’t say ‘in darkness’ but that we ‘were darkness’ (ESV). The transforming power of the gospel is so complete that we literally change from being a state of darkness itself to walking in the light and shining that light. That is some seriously good news!

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.