

## The Meaning, Path and Practice of Wisdom

The Rev. Deacon Meghan Murphy-Gill + Church of the Ascension, Chicago + August 2021

Do you know what wisdom is, what it means to be wise? My guess is that you have a sense of it, if even you cannot define it precisely. After all, you count yourself as a member of this parish, whose identity centers on celebrating and practicing the wisdom of a particular Christian tradition. Maybe you know someone especially wise whom you seek out when in need of advice. Maybe there is an author whose books nourish your spirit and challenge your mind in a way no other writer can. Or perhaps you would describe yourself as on a path of seeking wisdom, through practice and prayer, whether saying the rosary regularly, taking daily contemplative walks, or practicing yoga.

Krista Tippett, the host of the NPR show *On Being*, on which she's interviewed many, if not most, of the world's foremost living wisdom figures, was recently asked to define wisdom on a podcast I was listening to on a run the other day. She'd written a book a few years ago titled *Becoming Wise* in which she reflected on her own spiritual journey as well as those of many practitioners of wisdom throughout the world. But it turns out that Tippett hadn't ever defined wisdom in her book. And so, she made an attempt in this interview. Wisdom is not the same as accomplishment or knowledge, she said, "though a wise person can be knowledgeable and accomplished," because those things are quantifiable, things we can point to. Instead, Tippett offered, we measure wisdom "by the imprint a person makes on the world around them."

In other words, wisdom is one of those I-know-it-when-I-see-it things. Wise people are known by their presence, Tippett said. They are known by the way their wisdom radiates from them. I think that this is why one of the names for God is Holy Wisdom. The source of wisdom is divine, and therefore you cannot fully define it for there is always more. You know it when you experience it – and when it is absent.

By virtue of our baptism, we are all called to grow in wisdom, to continue in the apostles' teachings, to persevere in resisting evil, to proclaim by word and example the good News, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice and peace. The only way to grow in this wisdom is to practice it.

We grow wiser as individuals by tending to our interior lives with care and attention as well as by engaging the world in which we are firmly situated. The imprint we leave on the worlds we inhabit requires a conversation between our interior and exterior lives. And true wisdom is earned in the pursuit of the balance between these two areas of our lives. I think that holds true not just for individuals but for communities as well.

We have an opportunity in the coming year to grow wiser together. Regardless of pandemic conditions, we will continue to find ways to gather, in person and/or virtually: to learn, to listen, and to tend to our interior lives while asking how we, as individuals and as a community of faith, can engage the world in which we so blessedly inhabit, to imprint it with the good news of Jesus Christ, God incarnate.

Is there a preacher or speaker you'd especially love to hear from? Or is there a book you'd love to read and explore with others? What topics would challenge your spirit and engage your mind? What would you find restful and restorative? What wisdom do you have to share with this faithful community?

Please join either or both of the upcoming conversations, details of which may be found in the August 18 newsletter, or feel free to find me at the church or send me an email. I look forward to hearing from you. I look forward to seeking a faithful path of wisdom with you in the year ahead.