

NT Reading: 1 Cor 1: 1-7, 18-31

### **1 Cor 1: 1-7, 18-31**

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup>To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,<sup>5</sup>for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— <sup>6</sup>just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— <sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup>For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." <sup>20</sup>Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.<sup>26</sup>Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no one might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup>He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup>in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

This morning I will look at the passages from 1 Corinthians chapters 1&2, which are the lectionary readings for the next 2 weeks. Then when I preach again on 2 Feb, I will focus on the gospel reading in Matthew 5, the passage we commonly call the beautitudes.

I invite you to notice that 1 Corinthians, 1 verse 3 states that grace comes from God and Christ. And then the verses go on to say that this grace given to us enriches in speech and knowledge of every kind. The notion of grace was a primary theme that the reformers believed was the good news of Christ. Paul in this passage in 1 Corinthians tells us it enriches us in every kind of knowledge.

What are we to make of this? Does it mean that knowledge of every kind informs the grace we receive? Does it mean that if we avoid this knowledge, by deciding to remain ignorant, we are not enriched in the grace of God known in Christ?

I suggest to you that to remain in ignorance is to diminish or lose the grace of God. There is the knowledge known through the sciences, knowledge known through the arts, knowledge known through spiritual traditions. Our knowledge today is extensive. Biology has given us insights about sexuality, and how our animal life has evolved. Astronomy gives us knowledge of how old the universe is, (13.8 billion years) and how it has been shaped and formed over this time. Geology teaches about the tectonic plates and what makes earthquakes happen, which incidentally has nothing to do with homosexuality. As Christians who receive the gifts of the grace of God, our grace is enriched by knowledge of every kind.

It is therefore biblically unsound to deliberately ignore this knowledge and to decide to remain ignorant. Grace requires us to have an open mind, a learning mind, a discerning mind. Paul writes wanting an informed community of faith, to understand the Christian life based on knowledge and to enrich the grace given in Christ by knowledge of all kinds.

Paul goes in the next part of his chapter to talk about wisdom. In his letter he contrasts wisdom that is oratory, rhetorical, cleverness that leaves God out, and man-centred wisdom, he contrasts that with a wisdom focussed on the cross. Paul gives wisdom a new meaning in which Christ crucified becomes the personal figure of wisdom, as God's agent in creation.

In

**1 Corinthians 2:6-8**

<sup>6</sup>Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. <sup>7</sup>But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup>None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Paul writes of a mature wisdom which is absent from the rulers of the age. There is a sense in which this is hidden because it is apprehended through the spirit. That is, we need to have an open mind, or an approach of grace. That does require we let go of trying to control everything. People who want to always be in control end up with closed minds. So Paul here is speaking of a wisdom built on:-

- knowledge of every kind, and grace centred, and
- the power of Christ centred on the spiritual life.

Now if we look at the Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, the wisdom literature is found in the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms. Proverbs 8 has a wisdom account of creation. Creation, providence and wisdom are the salient themes. Many Christian scholars, eg Karl Barth, have subordinated wisdom theology to salvation theology. Wisdom is not interested in salvation, except in the sense of save us from those who are ignorant and foolish.

So the nationalist theology of salvation history and covenant is only one stream of theology that should stand alongside but not above wisdom. For the sages, divine election and providence cannot be limited to Israel's election and history. The sages

speak of God in universal terms. The ground of moral authority is found in creation and wisdom.

Now for Paul, God's wisdom operates through sacrificial and self-giving love. And that is a spiritual gift.

Leo Purdue in his commentary of Wisdom Literature concludes: (p342)

"The thesis that wisdom searched for timeless ideas that transcended time and space cannot be maintained"

Wisdom develops in a context and as history and social thought changes, so does wisdom. I shall be looking at the Beautitudes in this theme of context, next time.

Let me conclude with this summary.

The opposite of wisdom is foolishness.

The opposite of knowledge is ignorance.

Wisdom is based on knowledge, and wisdom is greater than knowledge.

After all, a person may be knowledgeable but foolish.

Wisdom requires judgement, and that judgement includes how to use our knowledge.

Wisdom opens us to be informed by knowledge of all kinds.

Those who deny informed knowledge are not just ignorant, but foolish.

For Paul, grace is open to and informed by knowledge,  
and wisdom is a gift from God, known in Christ Jesus.

Next time we meet, I will argue that the Beautitudes are sayings or proverbs about how to be blessed or happy. To be blessed is to be in a state of well-being. I will connect this with well-being economics, and ask:

In the context of climate change, and given our world seems heading down the path to catastrophic climate change, is well-being economics up to the task?

And if not, can a wisdom theology prepare us for the catastrophes that may lie ahead?