

# The Gifts of Wisdom

- 8** Does not wisdom call,  
and does not understanding raise her voice?  
<sup>2</sup>On the heights, beside the way,  
at the crossroads she takes her stand;  
<sup>3</sup>beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:  
<sup>4</sup>"To you, O people, I call,  
and my cry is to all that live.  
<sup>5</sup>O simple ones, learn prudence;  
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.  
<sup>6</sup>Hear, for I will speak noble things,  
and from my lips will come what is right;  
<sup>7</sup>for my mouth will utter truth;  
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.  
<sup>8</sup>All the words of my mouth are righteous;  
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.  
<sup>9</sup>They are all straight to one who understands  
and right to those who find knowledge.  
<sup>10</sup>Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
<sup>11</sup>for wisdom is better than jewels,  
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.  
<sup>12</sup>I, wisdom, live with prudence,<sup>[a]</sup>  
and I attain knowledge and discretion.  
<sup>13</sup>The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.  
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil  
and perverted speech I hate.  
<sup>14</sup>I have good advice and sound wisdom;  
I have insight, I have strength.  
<sup>15</sup>By me kings reign,  
and rulers decree what is just;  
<sup>16</sup>by me rulers rule,  
and nobles, all who govern rightly.

<sup>17</sup>I love those who love me,  
and those who seek me diligently find me.  
<sup>18</sup>Riches and honor are with me,  
enduring wealth and prosperity.  
<sup>19</sup>My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield than choice silver.  
<sup>20</sup>I walk in the way of righteousness,  
along the paths of justice,  
<sup>21</sup>endowing with wealth those who love me,  
and filling their treasuries.

## Wisdom's Part in Creation

<sup>22</sup>The LORD created me at the beginning<sup>[b]</sup> of his work,<sup>[c]</sup>  
the first of his acts of long ago.  
<sup>23</sup>Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
<sup>24</sup>When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.  
<sup>25</sup>Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth—  
<sup>26</sup>when he had not yet made earth and fields,<sup>[d]</sup>  
or the world's first bits of soil.  
<sup>27</sup>When he established the heavens, I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
<sup>28</sup>when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,  
<sup>29</sup>when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,  
<sup>30</sup> then I was beside him, like a master worker;<sup>[e]</sup>  
and I was daily his<sup>[f]</sup> delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
<sup>31</sup>rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.

<sup>32</sup> "And now, my children, listen to me:  
happy are those who keep my ways.  
<sup>33</sup> Hear instruction and be wise,  
and do not neglect it.  
<sup>34</sup> Happy is the one who listens to me,  
watching daily at my gates,  
waiting beside my doors.  
<sup>35</sup> For whoever finds me finds life  
and obtains favor from the LORD;  
<sup>36</sup> but those who miss me injure themselves;  
all who hate me love death."

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Words of Wisdom

Proverbs 8; Romans 5:1-5; Trinity Sunday

Kerra Becker English

If I told you that I went to see “*21 Pilots*” after church last Sunday – who knows what I did?

Last Sunday we took Ryleigh to her first “big” concert. She’d seen live music with us before, but this time it would be music that she knew and could sing along to. In fact, we were surrounded by a LOT of young people in a stadium that seats more than 10,000. I had to chuckle when I saw one parent leading kids to their seats who was wearing a “Cool Mom” t-shirt. This was obviously a show attended by parents and their kids. It wasn’t like the concerts I went to as a teenager where my parents wanted nothing to do with the music I was listening to. They always hoped they didn’t have to go. But having heard and enjoyed a few *21 Pilots* songs on the radio, I figured we could make it a family event.

Am I ever glad we did? As one friend dubbed it, it sounded like a show fit for an ADHD audience. It was a visual barrage of images – a burning car, flashing lights, neon yellow everywhere, big screens, pyrotechnics, and even a little magic. And the music was just as high energy – with a fascinating array of electronica, but also with amazing musicality featuring primarily piano, ukulele, and drums. From start to finish of a LONG concert, there was not much time to do anything but absorb the music all around.

Maybe it doesn’t sound like your idea of a good time. But to look around and see the faces of the fans was incredible. Oddly, in all that extremely organized cacophony of sight and sound, there was a feeling of love, and support and appreciation that I’m not exactly sure how to describe. I

know that a large concert like that can pull on one's emotions, but there seemed to be an interchange between performer and audience that I dare say is pretty rare. Close to the end of the concert, the band's singer Tyler Joseph looked into the crowd and said, "We are *21 Pilots*, you are *21 Pilots*" and the crowd went wild.

Perhaps it's the chosen name of the band that keeps Joseph and drummer Josh Dun so grounded. The name was drawn from an Arthur Miller play, "All My Sons." Set during WWII, the main character, a businessman, chooses to send airplane parts he knows are faulty into the war effort, and 21 pilots lose their lives because of his decision to put his desire for profit first. At the end of the play, this character kills himself. It's an Arthur Miller play, so what do you expect? But the band's choice of a name was to remind them to always make the "right" decision, even if it wouldn't be the easiest one to make.

No matter what you might personally think about the music – what *21 Pilots* hope to convey in their music and with the whole of their brand is a sense of purpose. Their ultimate goal doesn't seem to be playing sold out shows – though they do consistently. Their goal seems to be to connect, to offer life-giving affirmations and hope to a stressed-out rising generation of young people. I found it to be an homage to the personification of wisdom we find in chapter 8 of Proverbs. Wise words are the elixir of life. And for some kid in that audience – hearing *21 Pilots* sing directly to him or her to stay alive and have hope might have been just the message they needed to do exactly that.

You may be beginning to wonder what this has to do with church. Does Kerra just need to fan-girl out on *21 Pilots*, or is there a point coming? The point, especially for the "what's the point" generation that *21 Pilots* is trying to reach is that life-giving words of wisdom were present from the very beginning of creation, and they still can be heard at the crossroads, *any* crossroads. This scripture lesson teaches us that wisdom preceded the Torah, preceded the Gospel and doesn't have

to be part of either to reach us. Wisdom is described as the OLDER sister to creation, since she was with God from the very, very beginning. And she is described as the urgent messenger for TODAY.

Now you might say I have a pretty loose definition of evangelism, because I would define that concert as the essence of the good news to a generation that is starving for it. When words of wisdom show up, it doesn't matter if they come from a Sunday morning pulpit or a Sunday night concert at the John Paul Jones arena in Charlottesville. One of my favorite singer/songwriters has said about that very dichotomy, "Ooh, there's a thin line between Saturday night and Sunday morning." Thank you, Jimmy Buffett. But given how the two events are differently attended, one could begin to lose hope that young people will find their way to wisdom – as if church had all the magic answers for them. Or one might begin to think that the way to reach young people at church is to put on the latest laser light show and bring in a drum set. There are plenty of churches who think that a different back beat will be exactly the ticket to bringing in the young families.

I say it's something different, something I saw in that particular concert, and that I notice routinely at church. What this younger generation needs, well, let's face it, what we all need, is that sense of purpose and connection. We need to be immersed in those places where wisdom is discovered and celebrated. We need to join wisdom at whatever crossroads she stands – even if it's somewhere we didn't expect to find her.

It's easy to dismiss the words, and songs, and life experiences of generations that aren't our own cohort. What I challenge you to do is simply listen. Though I am grateful for the young people who find their way to Ashland Presbyterian Church, you don't have to wait for them to be here to hear their stories, to ask them about their music, to wonder with them about the future. The generations younger than mine are concerned, and rightfully so, about the not-so-wise moves that devalue human life. If they hear wisdom's instruction at a concert – so be it. If they hear that

wisdom confirmed by their elders and by the larger faith community as well – even better. There’s no excuse for the church to wait on teaching justice and righteousness ONLY WHEN people come to us. It’s a big part of our job to follow wisdom out and into the world.

God was creating the WORLD back then. Wisdom and creation always get to be the oldest of God’s divine blessings. Then maybe sacred texts. Then maybe communities of believers. Then maybe the church – a lot later. Who am I to speak for God, but maybe God didn’t set out to create backsides so they would fit dutifully if not always so comfortably in pews? Or in stadium seating for that matter. What God did set out to do was create, and create, and create. And from creation, goodness and mercy arose. So did plants, and animals, and people of all kinds. And through that creation- WISDOM. Wise words, wise actions, instruction for life. Admonition to justice and righteousness, and kindness. It’s the recognition that life is a gift to be celebrated and enjoyed. It’s the reminder that wisdom is worth more than anything money can buy, and that leaders who lead with wisdom will be respected and trusted.

Given that I do stand in a pulpit on Sunday mornings, I do think that wisdom has an important place in the church. I don’t want people to quit coming here thinking that wisdom can be found just anywhere. We all know that isn’t true, even when she can pop up in some surprising places. But I also don’t think we have to be like concerts and other entertainment venues to win people over. Worship then can be less about obligation and more about reverence and praise. It can be about listening for our instruction and our charge to be watching daily at her gates, and waiting patiently by her doors. Whenever and wherever we experience wisdom, we will find life. Whenever and wherever we act on it, we will find favor with the Lord. Listen for words of wisdom, echoes of righteousness. And breathe fully into that air. Amen.