

Second Sunday After Christmas – 2022

1 Kings 3:4-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

Luke 2:40-52

If you could bestow any three virtues upon the American people, what would they be? If you could bestow any three superb attributes upon the young generation, upon your family members, upon LeBron James, and Steven Colbert and the mayor of Fresno, what would they be? Not four, mind you; we don't want to be too greedy. Not just two outstanding character traits; we don't want to be too meager. Three; three is a nice round number – a prime number. God likes the number three; I have a strong suspicion. If you had the power to bestow any three virtues on the American people, in this moment in time, what would they be? I'll give you a moment.

What about contentment? The bible speaks well of contentment (1 Timothy 6:6-11). Contentment is a safeguard against much evil. It is the corrective to avarice. What percentage of our society even considers contentment as a prize of the heart? Contentment might be a good choice. My somewhat older dictionary defines contentment this way: "Not inclined to complain or want something else; satisfied. Submissive to circumstances, resigned, accepting. Freedom from worry or unsatisfied desires." I like all that, of course. But that second bit doesn't really fit the moment we are living in – submissive to circumstances, resigned, accepting. Contentment is not one of my three.

What about patience? Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit, after all (Galatians 5:22-23). It's hard to go wrong with bestowing patience on people. All of us know impatient people. They are typically no fun to be around. Demanding, unforgiving, impatient people put us on edge. Here's the definition for patience: "Possessing or demonstrating quiet, uncomplaining endurance under distress or annoyance." The old joke is to never pray for patience, because God will bless you with difficulties for you to obtain what you pray for. How about fortitude? Now there's a quality virtue. When life gives you lemons, fortitude is the ticket. Fortitude is defined as "strength of mind in the face of pain, adversity or peril; patient and constant courage." So, how many of y'all would bestow fortitude on the American people? How about honesty, industriousness, humility or mercy? Which three would you choose?

As the New Year rang in, I was lying in my bed, listening to the fireworks and praying. It's an odd combination, I know. And my neighborhood seemingly had a lot to celebrate. The fireworks went on until 12:30am so that gave me a lot of time to pray. I think that my neighborhood was celebrating being done with 2021. I prayed for all of us. I prayed for wisdom, courage, and charity. Solomon writes this: "Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit is better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed" (Proverbs 3:13-18). Who here desires wisdom? Who here sees the need in our society for this priceless gift? Wisdom seems to be in short supply.

Wisdom is for the benefit of others – but you need courage to use it. Wisdom isn't intended to sit on the shelf. Wisdom is not useful in a dusty, unopened toolbox, never seeing the light of day. If the wise are not courageous they may stay in the shadows. The wise and the courageous are a blessing, but even more so if they are charitable. The strong are to bear with the weak. The strong are not to imitate the weak, not to patronize the weak but to speak and act charitably. Charity sees the value in every human and seeks to serve them, to elevate heart and mind, not to push “with side and shoulder, and thrust at the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad” (Ezekiel 34:21). Wisdom, courage, and charity – is that not the Lord Christ?

The twelve-year-old Son of God came to the Temple. His parents brought Jesus to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover and departed without Him in tow. His Father's house; Jesus was compelled to be in His Father's house. The aged teachers of the law; they were engaging the young Christ. What a wonder! “And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:47). We've all been around precocious children, youngsters who are uncommonly gifted intellectually. It's one thing for a child to be savvy around adults, to be articulate and possessing a marvelous memory, being able to pull in facts at an appropriate moment in a conversation and contribute to what is being discussed. This is different. St. Luke tells us that the child grew and became strong, filled with *wisdom* (Luke 2:40). This isn't a parlor trick. This isn't Jesus knowing the Jeopardy answer before Alex gets two words out of his mouth. The Son of God laid aside His divine prerogatives and He learned like anyone else would learn. How did Jesus become wise?

Here's another little bit from Proverbs: “Does not wisdom call? Does not understanding raise her voice? To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man. I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently *find me*” (Proverbs 8:1, 4, 17). The value of wisdom; the Son of God knew it. The Son of Man pursued it. Our Savior embodied wisdom and yet His soul thirsted for it. It's in God's Word. Wisdom is there, calling to you. Jesus valued this Word and was supremely in His element with those who did likewise. Jesus was mystified by His parents: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I *must be* in my Father's house?” (Luke 2:49). Jesus knew the Word, its content and its contour, its majesty and its grace, its veracity, its import, its power and its applicability. When faced with Satan in the desert and hell's foul philosophy, what did Jesus use to withstand, to rebut, to vanquish the evil one's temptations? God's Word (Luke 4:1-13). Wisdom and courage were intertwined when Jesus won that day.

We are saved by grace. But are we striving to become what God wills us to be? Striving! Effort! Wisdom is in short supply in America because we are lazy – not applying ourselves to God's Word. Wisdom is in short supply because we are addicted to pop culture which leaves us empty-headed and juvenile. Wisdom is in short supply because Christians are afraid to speak biblical truths, biblical words. Is it not time to leaven our conversations with God's Word? Is it not time to show the culture that we are not afraid to be exactly who God has made us to be? Are we ashamed of the wisdom that God has given us? Is it our desire to elevate the culture around us, a culture so in need of something beyond CNN, Bud Lite, and Marvel Comics?

Charity; it is charity that Christ bled and died for you. You are poor and He is rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Compassion led Him to give what He possessed. He knew what this blessed exchange would cost Him. In His wisdom, He saw what the product of His sacrifice would be –

the wealth of His glory being credited to your account (Hebrews 12:2). Charity is a crucified God bearing your sin. Courage is a Savior who will not be turned aside from His goal, His throne, His cross. His life is to saturate our own. This Bible verse speaks of you: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). When you die, when your body is raised from the dust of the earth, you will be like Him. God wants you to be like His Son and He will do it. Heaven, for us, will be sweet for we will be like our Lord. “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:49). We needn’t wait. His life is in us. His grace, His love, His Spirit, His body and blood – in us now. Keep these three in mind: Wisdom, courage and charity.