

Isaiah 50:4–9a; Mark 8:27–38

Grace to you and Peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

So my car has had this weird electrical problem for a couple of years. I've taken it to two different shops, with three different mechanics, on five different visits, and spent several hundred dollars. And it's taken two years to figure out why my seat heaters and the controls on my steering wheel for the cruise control and for the radio, as well as the horn not working – which also implied that the airbag didn't work. I didn't want to try to find out whether or not the air bag worked, but we assumed that because those things didn't work, the airbag didn't work.

The first mechanic told me that there was something that was shorting out the fuse that controlled all these, but he needed more time and a whole lot more money to figure it out. So, I figured, you know, it doesn't cost a whole lot to buy fuses, so I just bought fuses and kept replacing the fuses. I thought that was the smart thing to do.

The next mechanic – several months later – thought he knew exactly what the problem was. He said there was some kind of a module there in the steering wheel column, but he checked that out and it checked out okay. I took it back to him a while later and left it there for a few days and he checked out a whole bunch of other electrical modules, but all of those checked out fine. None of them was the problem, and he kind of scratched his head about the whole thing.

I had told this guy on my second visit that there was this problem that the light on my visor would always come on when I put the visor down. It wasn't supposed to come on except when you opened the little mirror. The light would come on even when you put the visor down. He said, oh no, he had checked that and that's not the problem.

So I took it back to the first folks who did a bit more extensive search than the first time, and this time they discovered that there was some non-factory wiring. Apparently something had been installed and then uninstalled, but not uninstalled correctly. They would have to take the whole dash apart in order to figure this out, so I drove home yet again.

Finally, this last August when we went away on vacation I dropped the car off. They would have it for a week to take a look at it. I got a call from them on Monday, after having dropped it off. Well, that non-factory wiring that they thought was the problem – that's not the problem.

I really wanted it fixed. Although I don't like honking the horn – I don't like being honked at, and so I try very hard not to honk at others – I do want a working airbag. The seat heaters would be nice, but I definitely wanted the working airbag. So, I thought the smartest thing to do would be to tell them – Keep looking for it.

The smart thing, the wise thing, that's what our first lesson is about. The book of Proverbs. I mentioned last week that the book of Proverbs is considered wisdom literature; so are the books of Job and Ecclesiastes. I'm sure we've all delved into those books, right? The book of Proverbs tends to emphasize proverbial or conventional wisdom, while Job and Ecclesiastes do just the opposite; they tend to question conventional wisdom.

So, in other words, Proverbs tends to be about common sense. It emphasizes learning, knowledge, education, figuring things out. Which is all good stuff. But as I have come to learn in my life, – and I really do wish I could remember where I first read it – common sense really does not appear to be all that common.

In our reading tonight, the speaker Wisdom – Wisdom, throughout the book of Proverbs is referred to in the feminine form – she asks us, “How long, oh simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one listened, and because you have ignored all of my counsel and would have none of my reproof, waywardness kills the simple and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me (those who listen to Wisdom) will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.”

Now I don’t mean to imply that we all have to be rocket scientists, or part of the Mensa program, or have perfect SAT scores. I do believe that God gives us all a brain. Wisdom is telling us to use the brain that God gave us.

One of my favorite theologians, a woman named Becky Enney (you might know her) says that one of things that she enjoys about being a believer in the Lutheran tradition is that Lutherans do not require to leave her brain in the narthex when she comes in to worship. In other words, Lutherans encourage us to think.

Some non-Biblical sayings that I think deal with wisdom. From that great author, anonymous, “There are three times when you should never say anything important to a person; when that person is tired, when they are angry, or when they have just made a mistake.”

Another one. “Wise people think all they say; fools say all they think.”

A wise school teacher once sent a note home to the parents on the first day of school. “If you promise not to believe everything your child says happens at school, I’ll promise not to believe everything they say happens at home.”

The great British author, G.K.Chesterton and several other literary figures were once asked what book would they prefer to have with them if they were stranded on a desert island. The first one said, “The complete works of Shakespeare.” The next one said, “I would choose the Bible.” When Chesterton was asked, he replied, “I would choose Thomas’ *Guide to Practical Ship Building*.” Smart man.

In our gospel lesson tonight, although it doesn’t directly address wisdom, Jesus does ask this very wise question, “Who am I?” “Who do you think that I am?” The answers bounced around all over the place until Peter more or less blurts out, “Well, you are the Messiah, the Chosen One, the one sent by God.” But then, when Jesus begins to explain exactly what that means, Peter turns around and he rebukes Jesus (Rebuke – to criticize or reprove sharply). So, Peter starts to put Jesus down and Jesus in turn smacks Peter down into his place. Not actually, but verbally. How wise of a move is it for Peter to say, “Hey wait a minute, Jesus, you don’t know what you’re talking about, buddy.”

Eugene Peterson is the man who wrote the paraphrase of scripture called *The Message*. Some of you may be familiar with it. It is a very modern paraphrase of the Bible. Eugene Peterson writes this about Peter.

“Among the apostles, the one absolutely stunning success was Judas, and the one thoroughly groveling failure was Peter. Judas was a success in the ways that most impress us: He was successful both financially and politically... And Peter was a failure

in ways that most dread: He was impotent in a crisis and socially inept. At the arrest of Jesus, he collapsed, a hapless, blustering coward; in the most critical situations of his life with Jesus, the confession on the road to Caesarea Philippi and the vision on the Mount of Transfiguration, he said the most embarrassingly inappropriate things... Time, of course, has reversed our judgment on the two men. Judas is now a byword for betrayal, and Peter is one of the most honored names in the church and in the world. Judas is a villain; Peter is a saint. Yet the world continues to chase after the successes of Judas, financial wealth and political power, and to defend itself against the failures of Peter, impotence and ineptness.”

Which, I wonder, would Lady Wisdom say is indeed the better man?

Okay, so my car with the weird electrical problems. Two shops, three mechanics, five visits, several hundred dollars. The last time, when I left my car at the shop in August, they finally figured it out. Now, when you buy a “previously owned” car, oftentimes you get more on the car than what you might have gotten on the car had you bought it yourself new. This car came with one of those fancy visors with the built-in little unit in the visor that I program to open the garage door, or open the lights when we come into our driveway, but since I don’t have a garage door opener, and we don’t have one of those fancy things for our lights, I’ve never bothered to use it. But, it’s built into the visor itself.

Now, I had suspected that something was wrong with the visor because, like I said, the dome light kept coming on. But, what it turned out to be – that little bugger had burned out. It had shorted out, and in so doing overloaded the fuse off of which it ran, which in turn was related to the seat heaters, and the steering wheel controls, and the airbag. That’s what was causing the problem. Know how we fixed it? We unplugged it. It was simple. It was expedient. It was, dare I say, the wise move.

Sometimes, I believe that the wisest thing is indeed the simplest thing. “Who am I?” Jesus asks. He is answered, “You are God. You are love. You are the font of all knowledge.” We say to Jesus again, “Help us to be wise in our own living, loving in our own faith, caring in our giving, not scoffing, or foolish in our belief, so that we, being wise people of God, might say, “Amen.”