

If this is wisdom, then I would rather be a fool!

Ecclesiastes 7.1-14

Today's TFTD comes from Rachel.

The summer before I started training to be a Reader, I decided to read a book on theology. I knew it would be demanding so I set myself a goal of getting through a chapter a week. In hindsight that was far too ambitious because it took me a month to get through just one page!

It was not the words that were the stumbling block but the sentences. It was as if all the words had been thrown up into the air and then fallen back onto the page in some random order. Evening after evening, I wrestled with those sentences, reading them over and over again until at last a flicker of understanding begun to dawn.

Discovering the boundaries of your understanding can be a source of great frustration but also a springboard to growth. The way I see it, is that the sum total of my knowledge and insight sits under what I can best describe as a canvas dome. My view of the world, my awareness of God, my interactions with others, are predominately informed by what exists within the confines of that dome. Then some new insight will come along and create havoc will all my preconceptions until a tear appears in the roof of that dome. It is that stage when I begin to discern what lies above and to glimpse truths that have previously been hidden.

And that, in my book, is the path to wisdom ... but is it?

I reckon that what sets apart those wise people we seek out in times of trouble, those people who have the knack to speak to the longing of our souls, is that they experience that havoc time and time again.

So, what do we learn from these verses of this “Wisdom” Book about the art of being wise?

They tell me that wisdom is an endless quest for truth ... a quest that may take you down some rather dark alleys.

I wonder what it is that prompts the author of Ecclesiastes to declare that “the day of death (*is better*) than the day of birth” or that “it is better to go to the house of mourning”, or even that “sorrow is better than laughter” Eccl. 7: 1-3?

I dare say we could unpack those verses until we found spiritual enlightenment, but then quite frankly do I really want to? They have that unmistakable hint of something else, something that even as children we perceived in others as disillusionment and depression.

Does disillusion make us wise or does wisdom bring disillusion? Probably a bit of both yet I can't help thinking that if that is wisdom, then please, I would rather be fool ... a happy one.

In those verses, there is a sense of havoc, the struggles of a troubled mind, the

blurring of the lines between wisdom and foolishness... “surely oppression makes the wise foolish” Eccl.7:7 . Yet what sets wisdom and foolishness apart, is that wisdom takes us forward.

For then, at last, wisdom emerges triumphant out of that sense of havoc arises new hope, the fusion of three ideas:

1. That wisdom is life-giving Eccl. 7:12
2. That God inhabits wisdom, evoking the worlds of Prov. 9:10 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”
3. That there is wisdom in accepting what we cannot change “Consider the works of God, who can make straight what He has made crooked.” Eccles. 7: 13.

It prompts us to ask ourselves:

What are those things which are holding us back which we need to accept to allow us to move forward?

What is it that we need to let go at the foot of Christ’s cross to rediscover inner peace? And yet, however monumental, however liberating that step can be acceptance is only part of the story, in the search for truth. There is also wisdom in striving for change, wisdom in challenging what is, wisdom in chipping away at what seems unsurmountable.

The pursuit of wisdom is like reading a book of theology. It is not the words that are the stumbling blocks but the sentences ... the jumble of pulling together the threads of our understanding, in the knowledge that there are greater truths yet to come: “God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them” Eccl. 7:14.

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