

“WHERE DID HE GET HIS WISDOM”
Proverbs 8:1, 32-36, James 3:13-18, Mark 6:1-6a
Are You the Christ Series #2, May 10, 2020

“Alexander Grigolia had immigrated to America from Soviet Georgia, learned English, earned three doctoral degrees, and become a successful professor at the University of Pennsylvania. But despite his freedom, and achievements, he had a misery in his heart that he couldn’t dislodge.

“One day while getting a shoeshine, he noticed that the bootblack went about his work with a sense of joy, scrubbing and buffing and smiling and talking. Finally Dr. Grigolia could stand it no longer. He said in his funny-sounding accent, ‘What always you so happy?’

“Looking up, the bootblack paused and replied, ‘Jesus. He love me. He died so God could forgive my badness. He makes me happy.’

“The professor snapped his newspaper back in front of his face, completely disregarding what was said, and the bootblack went back to work.

“But Dr. Grigolia never escaped those words, and they brought him eventually to the Savior. He later became a professor of anthropology at Wheaton College, and taught, among others, a young student named Billy Graham.”¹

Many times we reject wisdom from others because it seems to us at the time as ridiculous, offensive, or even absurd, especially if it comes from someone we knew when they were young, and they were far less than credible at that time. Maybe it was who they were, or their family, or what they are doing now, but for some reason, we decide that the information they are giving us just is not acceptable. And when it is our home town where we return to is the place where **we** are sharing the information or wisdom, we may just be “tolerated” rather than taken seriously.

And that’s what we find happened to **Jesus when He returned home to Nazareth**. He had become a popular presence in Israel, and when He made a visit back home, the folks there were very reluctant to accept the wisdom that He shared with them. He had gone to worship at the Temple, and

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 773-4)

has been handed the Scriptures to read. Many of the people there could see the man, Jesus, because they knew Him when He was a child. They remembered Him when he was a little tyke, barely able to hold up one end of a plank of wood while “helping” His father, Joseph, in the carpenter shop. Although they all spoke well of Jesus, maybe because of the memories they had, they had a difficult time receiving His wisdom that day in the Temple. And so they ask the second question of our six-week series, entitled “Are You the Christ,” by asking among themselves, “Where did He get all this? What wisdom is this that has been given Him?” Listen to the way that Mark’s Gospel lays it out (READ Mark 6:1-6a).

So Jesus goes to Nazareth in Galilee with His disciples, and on the Sabbath He goes to teach in the temple. And when Jesus’ teaching gets very specific, the people get disturbed. His presentation and presence was so strong that **the people were amazed, Astounded, in fact, ASTONISHED!!!** They heard what Jesus said and they were so surprised by His words that they were shocked. It was too much to be true. It was so amazing they could not begin to believe it. This home-town-boy comes back to town and preaches like that, and it’s too much for them. The words He was telling them were so revolutionary it almost caused a riot right there in the Temple. They got so angry that Luke’s Gospel tells us they tried to throw Him off the cliff that Nazareth was built upon.

The people of Nazareth were **surprised that Jesus was the one teaching**. They were astonished that Jesus taught at all! So with a sneer on their lips, they question, “*Isn’t he the carpenter...?*” (Mk. 6:3). They were judging Jesus based upon His origin, son of a carpenter. That question raised the issue of whether a *carpenter* COULD actually teach, much less with authority or wisdom. They looked at His humble profession before He began in ministry, and they judged that Jesus wasn’t smart enough, or SOMEBODY enough to teach that way. “*Where did He get all this?*”

And then they move on for Jesus to be even more incapable of giving wisdom to them. They ask, “*(isn’t He) the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t His sisters living here?*” (Mk. 6:3). In essence, they were saying, “Jesus is just one of us! How could He get all this wisdom to teach us?” Jesus had no seminary training, no graduate level classes. He had no

special training under any one of the Rabbi's in town. He was – well – he was only Jesus. No big deal. A local yokel. They were judging Jesus based upon what they knew about Him. And so surprised were they by Him doing the teaching, that they rejected His wisdom because everyone in town knew who He was and that He couldn't possibly be able to teach like that.

It would be like us making a judgement on a person because of what occupation they held as to whether or not they had the smarts to teach a Bible study. People are questioned about their ability based upon the job they hold, or the position they have. I've heard people say such things as "He's just a mechanic! What does He know about the Bible?" Or, "She's just a housewife! How would she know about the things of God?" For many people, unless you have a Master's degree, a PhD or some sort of Doctorate with letters either before or after your name, you are not capable of sharing the wisdom of God or have any understanding of Jesus. And that's basically what they were saying about Jesus, "*What wisdom is this that has been given HIM?*" (Mk. 6:2).

Yet, that's not what we hear from James 3:13-18. James says "*Are there any of you who are wise and understanding? You are to prove it by your good life, by your good deeds performed with humility and wisdom. But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil. But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.*" There is no limit as to who can have wisdom. So even the most humble person of the lowliest profession is capable of great wisdom to share with others, IF they are willing to listen. Everyone is capable of having and sharing wisdom if they humble themselves before the Lord and allow Him to give it to them.

But it is so true today that "a political proposal is automatically rejected because somebody from the opposition party forwarded it: it is growing on the wrong tree (that is, not on our tree), so we nip it in

the bud. It comes from the wrong race or the wrong region or the wrong side of town. So a person or an idea is judged, or esteemed, not on merit, but on the basis of what town or century it comes from. Judging by genealogy is, as Halford Luccock has said, ‘a powerful and influential way of...not thinking.’”² Many rejected Jesus’ words that day because of where He was from rather than Who He Is.

And if they were astonished that Jesus taught, they were even more **dumbfounded by WHAT He taught.** Look with me to what Jesus was teaching (Luke 4:18-21). Jesus says, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has chosen Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save His people.*’ Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on Him, as He said to them, *‘This passage of Scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.’*”

Jesus was claiming this Scripture of Isaiah 61 as what He was all about! These were His work orders and Jesus was sharing with His own people, the folks at Nazareth, that He was the Suffering Servant, come to set the people of the world free from their bondage to sin. But how could this be? This local boy comes home and claims that Scripture was being fulfilled right then through Him? Preposterous! Out of the question! Completely ridiculous! They knew Jesus, and the Messiah He wasn't, for them at least.

You see, Jesus had turned from preaching to meddling. He had now dared to be someone specially called by God to do the work that only God could do. That not only surprised and dumbfounded the people of Nazareth, it infuriated them. They were astonished in anger.

But the **astonishment of wonder** is quite a different thing. When we see something that we have never seen before, there is great wonder in our eyes and in our hearts. When I was first ordained into ministry in the United Methodist Church, Bishop David Lawson took a group of us to Israel. What a way to begin ministry! I was always the last one back on the bus because everything I had learned

² (R. Benjamin Garrison, *Are You the Christ?* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978] pg. 29-30)

about the Bible was suddenly coming true for me right there in front of my eyes. I couldn't get enough of the beauty and elegance of the country. I was astonished by wonder. It got to the point that Bishop Lawson was shaking his head as he would have to call me away from each site we visited.

And this is what it is like for someone to hear the Gospel message for the first time. There is awe and wonder at the things that God has done for us on our behalf in order to have us back in fellowship with Him. Those who have already heard the words are often bored by the presentation of these marvelous words, but one who has never heard them are astounded by wonder.

Unfortunately that was not the case in Nazareth. Instead of being astonished in wonder, the people became angry. They had heard the words before, and to have Jesus suddenly tell them that they had now become fulfilled in their hearing was offensive to them rather than wonder-filled for them. It is what William Blake calls "the fallacy of the familiar." The people "knew" Jesus too well for Him to really be the One the Scriptures were talking about. So they think no one that great could possibly come from Nazareth!

Another astonishing thing about Jesus' visit to His home town was that **His own family wondered where He got that wisdom.** It had not been too long before this visit that Mary and her family had gone looking for Jesus to try to talk Him out of what He was doing. At that time, Jesus had said, "*Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Whoever does what God wants him to do is my brother, my sister, my mother*" (Mark 3:33-35). There seems to have been no support for Jesus at all from His family at this point, so when He preaches in the Temple, they are asking the same questions as everybody else. "*Where did He get all this?*"

So Jesus' statement to the people was also for His own family. He says, "*A prophet is respected everywhere except in His own hometown and by His relatives and His family*" (Mk. 6:4). At least 30 years had passed since Jesus' marvelous birth that had amazed both Joseph and Mary. It was 18 years since Jesus made His statement in the Temple at Jerusalem that He was "*about His Father's business*" (Luke 4:49). So life had become business as usual, Jesus had become the carpenter in His father,

Joseph's, absence, and His purpose of being the Messiah had been forgotten. When a parent sees their child every day, there is little expectation that he or she might understand something better than they do. So it was as much a surprise for Mary and her family to hear Jesus give such wisdom as it was for the others at the Temple that day. He certainly didn't get it from Joseph, His father. It is a rare thing to have a parent recognize and encourage the greatness that their child has been called to have.

So the people at Nazareth do not believe what Jesus has said to them. They reject Him as the Messiah, and we are told that He was not able to do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

But **what was this wisdom that Jesus was presenting?** Most of Jesus' teachings were straight out of the teachings of Moses, the 10 Commandments, the teachings in Leviticus, the words of the Prophets – He made use of all of what we call the Old Testament and taught them again to the people using stories and illustrations to help make them come alive. Jesus' teachings were not original with Him, but were straight out of the Scriptures. What made Jesus' teachings original was that He claimed the same heritage as the rest of the people AND He embodied the teachings and made them real.

William Cannon, in his book *The Redeemer: The Work and Person of Jesus Christ* ([Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951] pgs. 105-106), states it like this: “Jesus in His teaching about the Kingdom of God accepts the Plot of Judaism, but what He does with that plot is His own handiwork, and the lessons He draws and the truth He declares are those which have been of lasting value to all mankind...All Jesus' moral precepts, even the golden Rule, can be traced to their rabbinic source. His worth as a teacher does not lie in what He discovered but in the use He made of the discoveries of others. He acted as if all He taught was true. He was the answer to His own prayer. He spoke with authority, **for every day He lived the message He proclaimed**” (bold is mine).

“The Wisdom of Jesus is truly original, in one sense, as He lived it out. We may say of Jesus, as has been said of Shakespeare, “He was more original than His originals.”³ He taught to “*love your neighbor as you love yourself*” (Leviticus 19:18), and then reached out to the outcast and despised. He

³ (R. Benjamin Garrison, *Are You the Christ*, pg. 34-35)

taught to “*love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (Matthew 5:43-44), and He prayed for the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees who would sentence Him to death. Jesus taught to “*forgive...seventy times seven*” (Matthew 18:22) and then forgave those who nailed Him to the cross. He taught about sowing God’s Word as seeds into the ground (Mark 4:13-20) and spent His whole ministry sharing the Word of God with the people. He taught about the value of obedience, and then showed the disciples, who caught boat loads of fish (Luke 5:4-10). He taught not to judge others, and He lived it out by confronting the elders who brought a woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). He taught about having faith in Him, and then Peter was able to walk on the water when Jesus called him to do so (Matthew 14:22-33). He taught about spending time in prayer, and modeled it by praying very early in the morning (Mark 1:35). Jesus lived what He taught. He did what He said and said what He did.

I like the way the German language explains the word *fact*. It is a fascinating compound. They speak of *fact* as “Tat-Wort, the ‘deed-word.’ What this points to is the undeniable certainty and reality that fact is fact and truth is true only insofar as both are *done*.”⁴ Jesus taught truth, AND He lived truth. He taught about God, and then lived it before the people so that they could see exactly what that meant. Jesus put His teachings into action, exemplified by the miracles that He did.

He taught about life after death, and then raised many folks from death (Mark 5:35-43, Luke 7:11-17)). Jesus taught about compassion for others and He fed the multitudes (Mark 6:30-44), He healed the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), He healed the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8), and He cast out demons (Luke 8:26-39, Mark 9:14-29). Jesus taught the value of self-giving, and then lifted up the poor widow who gave all she had to honor God (Mark 12:41-44). Jesus taught about the importance of seeing with your heart as He gave sight to the blind, yet confounded the Pharisees (Matthew 12:22-24, John 9). Jesus embodied all that He taught, showing the fact that He had the power of God as the Son of God.

But the Galileans in Nazareth were not willing to join their faith to the fact that Jesus was the

⁴ (*Are You the Christ*, pg. 35)

One He professed to be. They could not separate their faith from the facts. They had the fact that God would send One who bring freedom to the people of Israel and become their Messiah. The Prophets foretold that God would do it. The problem was putting their faith in the ONE who was sent to BE the Messiah. Jesus was the Fact of God's fulfilled prophecy, but the people refused to put their faith and trust in Him because they had too much fact about who they thought Jesus was. They would not accept Jesus as God's chosen One. They refused to accept that God had given Jesus the Wisdom from Heaven to share with the people on earth, even when He lived it out before them.

Jesus' ministry was authentic in that everything He said, He did, and He did what He said. His whole life was a living witness to the embodiment of the Scriptures. He was given wisdom by God in order to live it out before us. He lived His wisdom in order to accomplish God's plan of Salvation for the world. Jesus loved us so much that He lived the Wisdom of God so that we might be drawn back to Him through our faith. He lived so that everyone might find life through Him; the man in the ditch, the woman at the well, the foreigner, the boy tending sheep, the sinner, as well as the Caesar on the throne.

And we are called to live like Him, sharing the wisdom that God gives to us with those around us so that they, too, might find salvation through Jesus Christ. We don't need fancy degrees to tell others about the love Jesus has for us. We don't have to have eloquent speech to live a life that is obvious about our faith in Jesus. We don't have to be up-front-people to care for the hurting world – we can pray, support others, and give toward those who are active on the front. There is so much that each one of us can do with the gifts and abilities God has given to us to help take the name of Jesus with us. The key is our willingness to follow Jesus' example, trust in His guidance and being available to go for Him when He sends us the opportunity to serve. That's the way we acknowledge the wisdom of Jesus.

So I invite you to be open to learning from the wisdom of Jesus, and then putting it to use for the Kingdom of God, not judging one another, but seeking the great wonder of His truth and growing deeper in your faith, in Jesus' name. AMEN.