# A Sermon Rev. Thomas V. Abbott 11/25/18

**"Final Words of Wisdom"**

**Scripture Passages: 1) Psalm 77:11-15**

**2) 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22**

**3) 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28**

**Passing on Wisdom:** What is wisdom? It seems to me that wisdom equates to insights for how to live that makes life, relationships, and communities healthier.

If we accept that definition for wisdom, then it seems to me that wisdom is something we should seek. But where do we find it? How do we grow in wisdom? How do we grow in ways of living that makes our lives, our relationships, and our communities healthier?

As followers of the Jesus Way, Scripture is a key place for us to seek wisdom. Listening to the Holy Spirit which God has placed in us as a gift is a key place for us to seek wisdom. And I think watching and learning from others is another key place for us to seek wisdom. Today I want to encourage each of us to consider how intentional we are about seeking wisdom. I also want to encourage us to consider those people who have helped us grow in wisdom, whether through their example, their teaching, or their writing. Who have been those people who have given you insights for how to live that have then produced a healthier self, healthier relationships, and healthier community?

When I think about my life, I am incredibly thankful for all the different people that God has placed in my path who have in one way or another helped me grow in wisdom, helped me live in ways that produce health within me and around me.

For instance, I think about Roxy. She and her husband were the Executive Presbyters in Central Nebraska Presbytery, where I began my pastoral ministry. Roxy took me under her wing, and through her example and through her caring, and through her teaching helped me grow in my understanding of the pastoral role. Thanks to Roxy, I think I have had more wisdom for living out my life as a pastor.

I think about Pete Moller. Pete was a member of the Leadville congregation. Pete taught environmental studies at the local community college. Pete was my neighbor living across the street. I think more than any other person, Pete taught me how to live the Jesus Way: to live simply, so others can simply live, to be a steward of all of God’ creation, to see every person as a precious child of God, to live humbly, to be careful with words, to be courageous about justice. I learned so much wisdom from Pete and all I did was watch my neighbor live his life.

I think about David and Naomi Wenger. David and Naomi run a spiritual retreat center outside of Three Rivers, Michigan. They became close friends while we lived in Paw Paw. I had never met two people so intentional about their marriage, about their parenting, about their life together as a family. I learned so much wisdom from them about family life, as I watched them live as a couple.

I am so thankful for the people God has placed and continues to place in my life who help me grow in wisdom, help me grow in ways that make my life healthier, my relationships healthier, the communities in which I live healthier. Who have been those people who have imparted wisdom into your life? How has God blessed you with the impartation of wisdom?

**Paul’s Wisdom:** Today we come to the end of Paul’s first letter to the church in Thessalonica. Paul ended his letter with a grocery list of wisdom.

If you were writing a letter to Cottonwood what wisdom might you feel it imperative to impart as you brought your letter to a close? What wisdom might help us become healthier as followers of the Jesus way, and as a community of faith, and as participants in the community of the world?

If you don’t have a Bible out, please pull one out and turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, beginning with verse 12. I want to simply work our way through the ending of Paul’s letter, Paul’s grocery list of wisdom.

Paul began, “But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”

Initially it may seem rather self-serving for me to highlight these first two verses. But in context we have to remember that Paul was writing before pastors existed. This verse does not necessarily relate to the pastor, although it could. The leaders in the Thessalonica congregation were lay people, and people absolutely new to faith in God, and to following the Jesus way. The leaders in Thessalonica were simply people willing to step up to the plate and take on a leadership role because they were excited about their faith.

Paul was reminding the congregation to have respect, esteem, and to love the people willing to provide spiritual leadership, leadership that sought to help people grow in their discipleship to Jesus.

In my experience few people want to step up to the plate and provide spiritual leadership within a congregation. That reality is something I would challenge everyone of us to reflect on, because in our situation everyone of us has much more experience with the Jesus way than anyone did in the Thessalonica congregation. Like Paul taught, we want to have respect, esteem and love for those people with the courage to lead spiritually, people who help us grow in our Godly wisdom.

Next Paul wrote, “Be at peace among yourselves.”

That wisdom statement refers to the preceding statement about respecting those willing to step up to the plate to provide spiritual leadership as well as to what will follow.

As a community, one of the best ways to support our leaders is to get along with each other, to love each other, to care for each other. Leaders often spend much of their time putting out fires in the midst of a community’s life. “Be at peace among yourselves” is a powerful way to love your leaders.

But being at peace among ourselves, not only benefits the leaders it benefits the whole life of the community. Next Paul wrote, “And we urge you, beloved to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.”

As a community, people are all over the map in terms of their journey of faith, and what they are dealing with in their own lives, and the experiences they have had. We want to both have patience for each other, as well as challenge each other, to step up. At the same time, we want to be aware when people are struggling with their faith, when they are filled with doubt, when they are feeling weak. We want to have special care and patience for those times in people’s lives.

Next Paul wrote, “See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.”

When we live in community, we are going to hurt each other. We are humans, it is what we do. But each of us chooses how we will respond when we feel hurt by someone else. Will we repay evil with evil? How do we behave when we feel hurt?

Paul challenges us to take the high road, to always do good to one another, even when we have been hurt in some way.

Paul then expanded the scope by saying, “A matter of fact do good to everyone.” Paul challenges us to do good to all people, to seek what is best for everyone, not just some. Paul, following Jesus, tells us to love our neighbor, and our neighbor is every other human on the planet.

Next Paul said, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

In other words, trust, trust in God, live as people of hope, it makes all the difference. When I met with Caroline Spooner’s family, in describing Caroline they talked about her as a person who was always positive, but not in a Pollyanna sort of way. I found that description of Caroline both beautiful and powerful.

Paul is aiming here for what we all experienced in Caroline. We all know people who seem sort giddy all the time, but it doesn’t seem authentic. When we have a deep trust in God, we can live with a joy and a hope that just oozes out of us in an authentic manner. Such a choice, such a manner of living is perhaps the greatest witness we can share with the world.

Next Paul wrote, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, and in our life together as a community. The Holy Spirit is at work in the world. We want to be on the look out for the Holy Spirit’s work and leading. We want to pay attention to people who seem connected to the Spirit’s leading. At the same time, Paul reminds us to test everything, make sure the “spirit’s” leading fits our mission of “Love God, and Love Neighbor”, “In Christ, together, for the world.” It is not the Spirit’s leading if it is not good for all people, if we are actually led toward doing evil to God or others.

Then Paul prayed, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.”

Paul ended by reminding the congregation that it is God, and God’s faithful work in us, around us, and through us that allows us to live out God’s wisdom. God will bring about the redemption, reconciliation, and restoration of the whole creation. God will do this and God calls us to join in what God is doing, trusting in the work of our Creator.

Finally, Paul wrote, “Beloved pray for us. Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

As a community the most important action we can take is to be continually praying for one another and for our life together, and to consider one another as family.

**Conclusion:** Paul has poured out his heart and his God given wisdom, so that we can be growing healthier as people, as a community, as a part of God’s creation. I hope we will not only consider Paul’s wisdom, but embrace it and incorporate it into our lives. Cottonwood let us be people who boldly seek the wisdom of God, for our lives and our life together. Amen.