

Text: *Matthew 11:19*

Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

From Stupidity to Wisdom: Finding Truth, By God!

Many of us are old enough to remember when it was hard to find information. I am old enough to remember when the card catalog was the sole key to written knowledge. I had a love affair with the big oak cases holding tens of thousands of cards. After more than a half century, I still remember my library card number, 42507. I spent more time writing down that number on slips of paper than I spent with my wife and children.

Today, I can Google an issue or subject and receive over a million hits in as fast as it takes our bits to fly at 186,000 miles a second. We are inundated by data. Sometimes I feel that I am holding a dictionary over my head and am going down for the third time into a turbulent sea of data masquerading as information. Most of the time this is a problem of no real consequence. Who cares that there are over ten thousand receipts for chocolate chip cookies? But if we are looking for solutions to a problem that impacts other people, we can quickly see questions of morality raising their churchly heads. So let us spend a few minutes wandering down the road from stupidity to wisdom.

Ignorance: Before we can properly deal with stupidity we need to visit ignorance. The most important thing to remember is that we are all ignorant and that there is no disgrace to being in a condition of ignorance. Indeed, the more intelligent we are, the greater is our recognition of our ignorance. As an example: I always knew that I was ignorant of engineering. Just how ignorant became evident when I taught a course in organization theory to a bunch of air force engineers. They quickly made me realize that I was ignorant in structural engineering, electronic engineering, aeronautical engineering, civil engineering, etc. My students increased my ignorance fourfold in the space of the first roll call. In this age of specialization we are all far more ignorant than our forefathers. There are few Renaissance men or women. Da Vinci might have been the genius master of the known universe, but the universe of knowledge was much smaller in Renaissance Europe than it is today. There is more than a little truth in the saying that the individual now knows more and more about less and less. I earned my keep by knowing a lot about a very small slice of human behavior.

Stupidity: So being ignorant is not a bad thing. It is simply recognition of how the world of knowledge works. But, stupidity! That is a far different matter. It is a willful turning away from facts that do not fit ones' ideological or attitudinal predispositions. This is not a clash of opinions. We all live where a gloriously diverse set of opinions co-exist. This is a repudiation of any facts that one finds to be inconvenient. Two well informed people might well agree on the facts of a problem, but disagree on how to solve it. This is especially likely to be true when dealing with issues of governmental policy. The same set of facts will produce different public policy recommendations. The debate should be reasonably rational and the results of that debate will have a high probability of being accepted by those who lost, because all sides agreed on the same set of facts (unless the values underlying the policy are wildly divergent).

In an argument, if no factual basis is agreed upon, then both parties are stupid – that is, they are willfully ignoring the world of factual reality. This is seen often in science vs lay person

debates. The scientific method produces facts that are at a given probability of being correct. One may hold that gravity is simply a probability statement, but if one ignores it to jump from a building an observer can, with certainty, call a hearse. In the physical and biological worlds the scientific method has produced a plethora of facts. We ignore those facts at our peril. Vaccinations, pandemics, medical models, evolution, all have been debated by lay people who rejected established facts. To debate policy preferences, accepting those facts, is responsible, to refuse to acknowledge the factual basis of biology is stupid.

Wisdom: We know that we are all ignorant; sometimes our emotional-ideological selves will get the better of us and we will be stupid. So, where does wisdom come in? In *Matthew*, Jesus says “wisdom is proved right by her actions.” Wisdom, then, is the use of facts, linked to values and embedded in an awareness of probable outcomes. Jesus is saying that while John the Baptist was accused of having a demon and that Jesus was accused of being a glutton and drunkard who consorted with sinners and tax collectors, the wisdom of Jesus would be seen in the resulting actions. Those actions were the salvation of human-kind.

In a much less grand fashion, we are called to be wise. We are asked to take the facts at hand, use those facts in developing solutions to problems. To be wise, those solutions must be in sync with our Christian values. Remember that Jesus summarized those values; love God and love one’s neighbor as you love yourself – remembering that all of human-kind is our neighbor.

Conclusion: Much of life involves plucking facts from the ocean of information, looking at our values and making choices that will lead to good and Godly results. Ignorance is always with us and will always grow as we better understand the complexity of God’s creation; stupidity is the sin of ignoring God’s tools which were given to us to comprehend that creation. Let us pray for wisdom, which is proved right by her actions. Amen