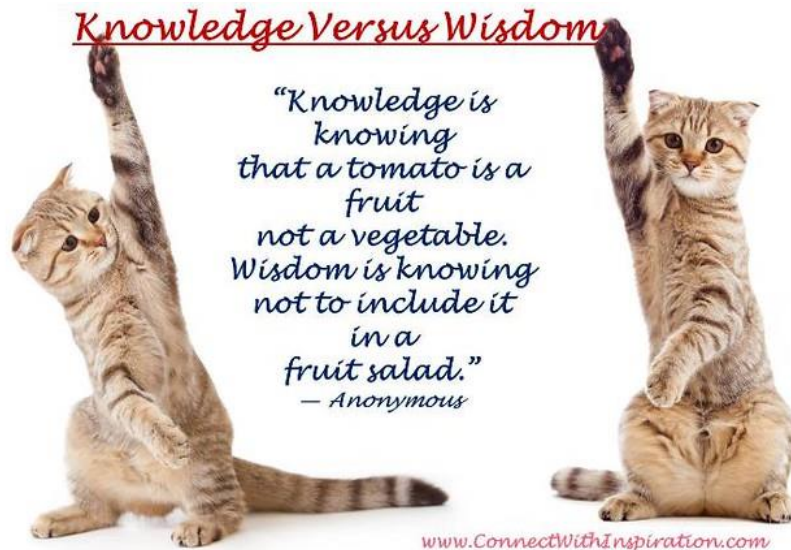


“Home: Needing Each Other for Greater Wisdom”
Galatians 6:2-6



So today’s focus is on wisdom, especially through community. We have been working through the theme of being a shelter for each other through practices of:

- Intentionally seeing others
- Paying attention to the presence of the soul in each person
- Having good conversations
- Sharing our struggles and our stories
- Connecting to our ancestors

One of the dangers of any spiritual teaching is that it can get reduced to a technique, a how-to kind of guidance. While we need some knowledge and techniques for our spiritual practices, the bulk of the work is relational and gradual. Wisdom is built through relationships and practices over time. It is built in the day-to-day encounters and practices. In the small acts of listening or taking time to breathe or pray, we put ourselves on the path of wisdom. Relational wisdom is something that grows in us through daily encounters with God, daily practices of honoring our souls, and our deep connections to others.

While we may long for quick fixes and clear answers for our dilemmas, it is so important to remember that life and faith are journeys and not destinations.

Do you ever find yourself at a crossroad where you wish for simple and clear answers? This is especially difficult when all the choices are good and moral. Which path do we choose?

The church in Galatia was at a crossroads of sorts. There was conflict and they wanted to get some clear solutions and answers from Paul.

Galatia was a Roman province in the highlands of central Anatolia (modern day Turkey). There were some agitators among those followers of Jesus. Paul was trying to counsel the Galatians on how to be faithful to Christ in the midst of a church conflict.

The agitators were telling the Galatian believers that they needed to be circumcised. It was not enough for them to just follow Jesus. They needed to become culturally and religiously Jewish in order to be protected from the wrath of the Roman Empire. The Jews had an exemption from the emperor for not participating in the worship celebrations of the imperial cult. The Jewish communities were a recognized entity for Rome and who participated in the imperial cult by having honorable inscriptions of the emperor in their synagogues and by participating in festivals, but they did not have to worship the emperor or participate in the imperial cult. The followers of Jesus who were Gentiles were not included in that special protection. So, the big issue here was safety from the Empire. But what the Apostle Paul did was to ask the Galatians to not participate in the imperial cult and to not succumb to the temptation of safety and security by demanding circumcision. That was the wrong motivation for circumcision. Paul wanted the Galatians to live in the freedom of Christ without fear from the empire. The old worldview which Paul himself held at one point was that power and domination were the tools for bringing order out of chaos.

But after his encounter with the living Christ on the way to Damascus, Paul saw things very differently. He no longer looked at life as a way to live comfortably, find personal satisfaction, and be happy. He saw life as a mission for Jesus, and thus for love. He saw life as a calling to commit to the greater good of all people. His own personal security and pleasure were no longer the measures of a good and successful life. After years of prayer and daily practices of knowing himself, both shadow and light, and living in community, he gained true wisdom in life. He knew that faithfulness to the way of love was what made life worthwhile. And the key to that way of love was to share each other's burdens instead of what the culture was teaching about competition, esteem, safety, and domination. He believed that the healing of the community depended on that wisdom. And so he wrote these words to them which encourage us today as well.

Let's listen to Galatians 6:1-6

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. ³ For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. ⁴ All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. ⁵ For all must carry their own loads. ⁶ Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. Fulfilling the law of Christ is about allowing space for pondering the love of God, our inner beings, and our connection to others. Paul reminded them of the Spirit of God which was living within their hearts. What they needed was the fruit of that Spirit within

them: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23a

These gifts are ours each day when we practice paying attention to God’s presence, our own souls, and the souls of others around us.

The Galatians needed to access that wisdom through the daily practice of active listening and compassion. They needed to allow God’s Spirit to show them the path of love. Paul did not give them a how-to guide. Instead, he reminded them that they already had all they needed within them. They just needed to practice opening to God and to others daily.

I would like to share with you a children’s book by Kobi Yamada. It is called, “Noticing.” It is a simplified way of summarizing the wisdom of our sermon series “In the Shelter of Each Other” and the power of noticing everything around us.