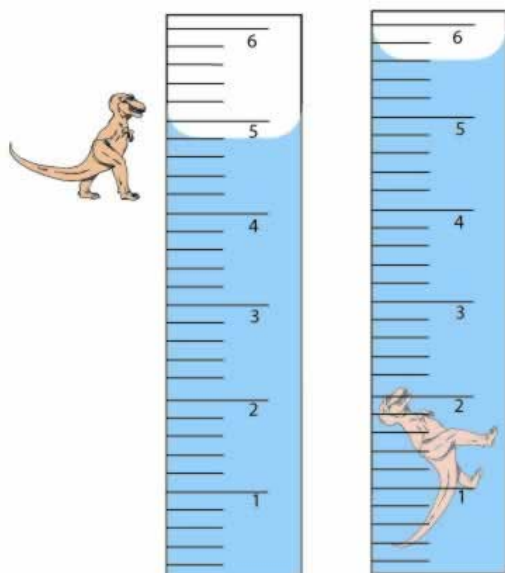


Good Things Come From Others' Wisdom

Receiving wisdom from others can be hard. Some of the earliest wisdom I remember receiving was from my older brother. I was probably 4 or 5 years old. My dad was pouring glasses of Coca-cola. Coke or pop of any kind was a rare treat for us, but this was a Friday night - movie night, so we got a special treat.

I'm watched him pour it, anticipating this amazing sugary drink. And as I watched, my excitement grew. And I asked my dad to put in a lot of ice for me. He asked me why, and I said because I wanted more pop, and the ice would give me more in the cup! Duh.

My wise, older brother started laughing and jeering at me and said something like, "You don't get more pop with more ice, stupid. Don't you understand volume displacement?!" I didn't. But I did after this very wise advice, though ill given. I've never forgotten volume displacement. Very helpful.



The lesson of volume displacement never gets old.

I've been a pastor here at Sanctuary for about 7 years. Through these years, there have been countless times where I've leaned on our senior pastors, Adey and Tom, for their wisdom and advice. This hasn't always been easy. Not so much because of how they've given wisdom and advice. They're much more kind than my older brother at 7 years old.

It hasn't always been easy because not infrequently, I've had to deal with my own resistance to submitting to someone else's perspective. I'm a fairly principled person, at least that's the story I tell myself, and I'm generally convinced I'm right. So when we've had competing visions for what to do, or when I just needed to change or adjust something, I've had to re-examine my own posture,

and get curious about what's going on inside, why I have a different view or why I'm so convinced I'm right.

Receiving advice or wisdom when is fraught, even when it's good advice. We can ask ourselves all sorts of questions about this: What is advice that you like to receive? When does it come to you? How does it come to you? And from whom? What is the advice you resist? And why? How do you sort through what's wisdom and what's not?

Consider this verse from the book of Proverbs in the Bible:

*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.
Proverbs 4:7*

What this means is that God invites us to become people who are open to receiving wisdom - open to submitting to others' viewpoints so it will go well for us. It likely costs us our own sense of ourselves and our own direction, but the results can be very good. I'm not talking about the random parenting advice you get at the gas station from some guy who thinks it's his job to tell everyone what to do.

Today, we're going to consider the good benefits of listening to others' wisdom, and we'll look at a story that really flips everything on its head. The story is one from Jesus' life where it's not Jesus dispensing the wisdom. Instead, it's Jesus following the wisdom of someone else: his mom. And some really, really good things happen as a result.

I chose this story in part because I had a lot of help in preparing. At the Sanctuary's Men's Retreat a few weeks ago, we did a group Bible study on this passage, and it was quite an amazing discussion. And I'll be drawing on a lot of the insights from that group as we walk through this story. So shout out to all the men who participated and now shaped this teaching. I'm stealing all your insights.

John 2:1-12

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or

thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. 12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

This is chapter 2 of John’s story of Jesus’ life. It’s Jesus’ first miracle. It happens at a party. He changes water into wine to keep the party going. That’s John’s opening of what Jesus is like - joy, wine, a wedding.

But Jesus seems like an unwilling participant in this joy-producing miracle. The party is in critical danger of ending early because the wine has run out. Jesus is clueless about this fact. He seems to be just enjoying the party with his friends, the disciples, until his mom comes over and alerts him to the fact that there’s no more wine.

Here are the verses again:

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Our Bible study at the men’s retreat noticed several interesting things about this interaction:

- 1) Jesus’ mom remains nameless. She’s simply called “the mother of Jesus,” so that her identity is in relation to Jesus. He’s the protagonist of the story, the main character. This is all about him. Which makes sense, in a way, it really is all about Jesus. It’s the gospel of Jesus Christ according to John. But Jesus’ mother, whom we know is called Mary from other stories, plays a crucial role in what happens here.
- 2) Jesus seems to treat his mom with a little bit of, I don’t know, dismissiveness? He calls her “woman,” and says quite confidently, “My hour has not yet come.” He understands that she’s implying he can do something about the problem. But he’s very confident in his own assessment of the situation. He’s confident in his own identity and his own sense of timing for

what needs to be done. It's not my time, he says to his mom.

- 3) But his mom doesn't even answer him. She turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you." Folks, can we just take a moment to marvel at this parenting moment. Your child - sure, he's an adult but he's still your child - says something you know is just not on track. And you don't even have to respond. You just go about your business and recognize that your child will come along to your wisdom soon enough. Oh, Mary! Some mad parenting skills on display here folks.

So let's just sit with Jesus for a minute. His mom has just told him, "Hey, this party needs you." He either does not want to help, or he doesn't think it will be good to help, or that it's not the right time. But his mom pushes back, and according to her wisdom, the time is now. The place is here. This is what Jesus has been preparing for, according to her and her wisdom.

We can feel the internal tension, the internal battle that's likely playing out within Jesus. He has to make a decision. Is he going to listen to his mom or not?

He's thinking: It's not my time, but Mom is often pretty right about stuff. But it's just a party, who cares if it ends early. It's not like people are going to starve. But it's their wedding day, and mom thinks I can do this for them.

So will he lean on his own internal sense of himself and his timing? Or will he submit to the wisdom of someone else, his own mother, whom he just called "woman."? Does he possess the humility to change? Does he have an open posture to receive outside advice and wisdom?

The tension is real.

Jesus' mom goes a step further with her direction to the servants. By instructing the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them, she has also provided a way for Jesus to go about this miracle quietly and stealthily. So he can sort retain a sense of his own timing - not going public - but still save the party.

Ultimately, Jesus submits to the wisdom of his mom. He has the servants fill the large stone basins with water. They are vessels of religious purity, and he turns them into the source of more joy and more partying.

Each of these vessels is 20-30 gallons. This friends [HOLD UP PROP] is about 30 gallons.

6 of them. That's 120-150 gallons of water.

And It is a lot of wine. It's about 750 bottles of wine.

And it's really really good wine too. It's not the wine equivalent of Coors Light. The steward tastes it and remarks that it should have been served first, not after all the guests have become drunk. I'm sure not all the guests are drunk, but we understand what he means.

So the party is saved. Jesus reveals his glory. The glory of keeping a wedding party going, of bringing joy. His disciples believe. The servants are the chief witnesses. And all of this happens because of the wisdom of Jesus' mom and Jesus' willingness to submit to her.

----->The miracle of changing water into wine, is as much attributable to Mary as it is to Jesus. Sure, Jesus has the power to change water into wine, but he doesn't take the initiative to do so. Nor does he want to do it. It's Mary who sees the need. She perceives the opportunity. She names it with him, and even after he pushes back and calls her "woman," she figures out a way

he can do it quietly and stealthily with the servants as co-conspirators.

This is a story that demonstrates Jesus' great power. It's a story that demonstrates God's interest in joy, and the connection between the glory of God and human joy. It's also a story of Jesus' submission, of humility, a story that invites us to consider the benefits of following the wisdom that comes from others.

Even Jesus listens to others and submits to wisdom when he hears it. Can we do the same? Are we likewise open to others' wisdom when it comes our way?

About 14 years ago, my wife Ali and I were at a crossroads. This was before we had children. We lived in Iowa City, and Ali was teaching at City High where she still teaches. I was working at a job I didn't enjoy at all, and there weren't really any options for moving forward in the job I was in. I felt like all the wine was gone, and the party was over. I had trouble finding joy.

But I was also taking classes part time through North Park Seminary in Chicago. It was mostly online classes and then some week-long intensives in Chicago.

Because I wasn't super happy with my job, I became convinced that Ali and I needed to move to Chicago so that I could engage with my studies full time, which was the norm for most seminary students. Doing studies full time would allow me to more quickly enter a career in ministry, and then everything would be in its right place and I would feel good about myself. Water would turn to wine, and I would find joy again. So I thought.

I began sharing this with Ali, and she had a very different perspective. She thought our life was just great. We loved each other. We had amazing friends and an amazing church community here. She loved her job. We both loved the quirky Iowa City area. And our roots were only going deeper as we lived life together in this place, within this community.

And she pushed back and asked why would uproot ourselves for a short time span in Chicago for my studies, and then have to move again somewhere else for a job. Why not just take our time and then once I graduated, we could figure out what to do.

She also pointed out, more importantly, how I often expressed uncertainty about a career in ministry. Which was very true. I often wavered in what I *thought* I wanted.

If you would have asked me, I would have said that I had no idea if I actually wanted to do church ministry as a career. But when I felt anxious about where I was going, I would grip tightly to the idea of a career and downplay any doubts within myself.

Ali, though, was listening to every part of myself. And she pointed out those doubts and uncertainties. And she didn't like the idea of completely uprooting our lives for the sake of something I wasn't even that sure about.

So there was a big tension here. The internal wrestling was pretty intense at times. So were mine and Ali's conversations. The stakes were pretty high. This was not easy.

Ultimately, I had to choose between submitting to Ali's wisdom or to further try and convince her and truthfully to convince myself that we should take the leap and move to Chicago.

But as I prayed and journaled, as I talked to my spiritual director about it and other friends, I sensed from Jesus an invitation to listen to Ali, to submit to her and to her wisdom.

And that's exactly what I did. We stayed. I finished school - ***it took me 6 years***. During that time, there were a lot of things I had to come to terms with: my own lack of a career and lack of direction. I had to face that squarely and ask myself how much of my self-worth did I wish to derive from a career. How much of my joy and sense of well being did I want to attach to images of success?

And in those years, we adopted our two children. Because I was in school part-time, and because Ali loved her job, I became a stay-at-home parent, the primary caregiver for our children. There were some very challenging things about that. But there were also some amazing gifts. I discovered ***new wine*** that was present to me. ***Jesus was turning water into wine all over the place, and I was finding it.*** I was like the servants in our story, seeing and participating in miracles, learning how to perceive joy even when I wasn't so certain about where I was going or what I was going to do.

We spent those years building deep, authentic relationships with great friends in an amazing community-- Our cups were filled to the brim with the new wine of Jesus. So much joy.

Soon after I finished seminary, I started as a half-time pastor here in this church, which is something that I had never even imagined in the years before it happened. It had never occurred to me I would be a pastor on staff in this church where Ali and I were members. But here I am.

It could be that Ali and I would have found Jesus' wine had we chosen to move. And many people move for very good reasons and find new wine in that move. But I'm so grateful for the path that we did choose. I'm grateful that I listened to Jesus' invitation to stay, to listen to Ali's wisdom. Even though it really challenged conceptions I had about myself.

So let me ask: What is the wisdom that is coming your way now? What will it look like to welcome it, to embrace it, to follow it? What does Jesus have to say about it?

Let me suggest a few ways we can put this into practice:

- 1) Be open to input and wisdom. Jesus is open. That's remarkable. A person with all his power. And maybe this shows that people with power would especially do well to welcome wisdom and input. (and maybe people with power are the ones most tempted to

ignore input and wisdom). But if Jesus, the most powerful human to have ever lived is open to wisdom and input, how much more so shall all of us listen to others?

This is very complex. There are other stories from the Bible where people try to instruct Jesus and offer advice, and he does not follow it. Because of his internal sense of who he is and where he's going, sometimes he rejects the advice of others. And sometimes, we may do the same thing. But we see in our story today Jesus embracing his mom's wisdom, submitting to her sense of what will be good. And it leads to a great miracle, and great joy.

2) Weigh the input and who's giving it. I'm not suggesting we follow any wisdom and advice uncritically. Jesus certainly pushes back. But then he weighs it, and he recognizes the wisdom. He also recognizes that it's from his mom. He trusts her. He knows that she loves him. I bet Jesus is curious about why she suggests what she's suggesting. He probably sees that it's not motivated out of any self-interest on her part. She's simply looking out for this new married couple and their families.

3) Evaluate the wisdom based on what you expect the results will be. The results of our story are glorious. We get one of the most fun and invigorating stories of the Bible. Water into wine! Now that is cool. Jesus' disciples believe in him. The whole thing anticipates the resurrection joy at Easter. So the results here are really good. *The results of me and Ali staying in Iowa City* and not moving have been good. We can evaluate wisdom and advice that comes our way by looking at the results. Maybe we try it out and see what happens. If it's a big decision, then we can't undo it, but at least we can learn. And then make the best of what happens as a result of our choice.

As we often do, I'd like to lead us in a prayer exercise. We're simply going to take a moment to listen to Jesus and see what wisdom Jesus has for us.

I invite you to get comfortable in your chair. Take a few breaths. You can close your eyes if that's helpful. We recognize your presence here, O God. Help us hear from you.

I invite you to take a moment to name a problem or a challenge you're facing right now. Maybe it's a difficult

relationship. Maybe you're at a crossroads of some kind. Name that problem or challenge to God.

What advice or wisdom has come your way, and what does God have to say about it? Is it some wisdom that would be helpful to follow? What prevents you from following it if so? If not, what would be the helpful course of action?

Invitation to Communion and Prayer Ministry

At this time, we'll transition to a time of worship, along with communion and prayer. The worship team can come forward.

2 things:

- 1) Take the opportunity for prayer ministry.
- 2) Or make an appointment to talk to a pastor or older person you respect in the congregation.

Communion reminds us that we come to Jesus to receive him, to receive all Jesus has for us. And this serves as a reminder that we can be open to receiving the wisdom of God as it comes to us through other people. Let's consider that as we come and receive from Jesus at the communion table this morning.

GENERAL INVITATION

- If you wish to be fed by Jesus, you're welcome to participate in communion.
- There are stations in the front and back, and you're welcome to come individually or in groups, serving yourselves or one another.
- At the tables, there are some cards with two suggested prayers that you might wish to try while receiving communion. Feel free to take one of those cards with you.
- You can also take this opportunity to receive prayer. There are prayer ministers available to pray with you in the foyer for [specific item related to teaching] or anything that you'd like prayer for.

Let me lead us in prayer -- please stand as you're able.

[pray] Amen. Come as you're ready.