

There’s a daily puzzle in the Appleton paper by David Ouellet called “WonderWord.” It’s a thematic word search and the words can be spelled out going left to right, or right to left; top down, or bottom to top; diagonally down, or diagonally up. Sometimes there is a word to be “found” that could be a different word if read from the opposite direction. Let me give you a few examples:

**L O O T** or **T O O L**

**G O D** or **D O G**

**L O V E** or **R E V O L T**

The same letters are used – but what direction you take them in leads to different things. Grab the **loot**; or use the **tool**. Pray to **God**; or pet your **dog**. **Love** what is happening; or **revolt** against it. . . . The arrangement of the letters matters. And which words we use matters. . . . At least that’s what I heard in our scripture readings today.

We’ve been given the choice of what words we will use. And what words we choose to use can lead us to wisdom or folly, blessing or curse. It all depends on what direction we want our words to go in, and whether our lives will then bear witness to our words.

One thing that shapes our choice of what words we will use is who, and what, we will listen to. We continually weigh: who we will listen to – or not; whose word we will believe and obey – or not; what we are willing to pay attention to, and be shaped by – or not. We determine how much time we will invest in listening to anyone or anything. We decide how thoughtful or discerning we will be as we’re listening. We set the filters on what we’ll hear but ignore, or what we’ll intently listen to and remember. We choose what we will mull over, and what we’ll reject. In fact, there is so much information constantly streaming past us – we can’t possibly take it all in, and we have to continually choose what we will listen to.

It shouldn’t surprise us then to read in Proverbs about “Lady Wisdom” showing up in the heart of town, in the midst of the hub bub of everyday life, in the center of all the sources of information that are bombarding us, to ask why we’re choosing not to listen to her. Has her message gotten lost in the buzz of non-stop noise we live in? Or have we deliberately turned away, and refused to listen to her? Do we fully understand what the consequences are of not heeding her counsel and despising her reproof? Because she’s

going to spell it out for us: we are complacent fools who will be destroyed. We will get our just desserts for rejecting wisdom. Panic will hit us like a storm. Calamity will whip us around like a whirlwind. Distress and anguish will overwhelm us. Our waywardness will kill us. . . . But it doesn't have to turn out that way. Because those who listen to wisdom, who choose to be humble before God, can live at ease, and be at peace.

At heart we know that Lady Wisdom is right. . . . But in our hearts we also know we don't consistently make wise or good choices. We make mistakes. We're tempted to act out of pride or envy or greed or one-up-man-ship. Arrogance or head-strong stubbornness can steer us away from wisely staying on the path of faithful discipleship. . . . We know we're perpetually see-sawing back and forth between being "our best selves" and "our worst selves." Between being wise and foolish. We know.

But simply knowing that isn't enough. If we have enough self-awareness to know when we're most inclined to give way to evil, to sin – then that's where we need to build up our capacity to hold the evil or sinful impulse in check – to learn to put the brakes on instead of stomping down on the gas. Learning to do that takes work. If we're willing to work on modifying or changing our established patterns of behavior, and the ways we've become accustomed to reacting, it helps to first slow ourselves down and focus our attention on what we're doing and what we're saying. To ask ourselves a few "why" questions:

“Why would I say that about that person?”

“Why would I do that when I'm here – but not anywhere else?”

“Why do I want to do this?”

“Why do I let myself do this?”

It may be hard to answer those questions honestly. And perhaps even harder to ask ourselves if we're ready to stop saying or doing these things – because we no longer want to be someone who would say such a thing, or do such a thing. That we're ready to confess to God that we need to change, that we need wisdom and strength that we don't have to make this change – but we trust that God does. . . . And do we believe that God would desire to help us make positive changes in our lives? Do we believe that God wants to guide us into the path of wisdom? Do we believe that God would assist us in choosing better words, better actions? . . . I don't think we'd be here if we didn't believe that God is ready, willing, and able to join with us in doing those very things – and so much more. Because God seeks for us to have abundant life.

Why don't we take some time to be in silent prayer with God. To ask for the help that we need to make a change in our life.

*Time of silent prayer.*

Amen.