Cardinal Virtues: Prudence

We come to the last of Aristotle’s four cardinal virtues. We have considered justice, courage, and self-control, and now we turn to prudence. According to Aristotle, the prudent person has the practical wisdom they need in order to discern the best and right course of action in any given circumstance. Because such a person has cultivated the qualities of insight and forethought, they are able to steer a middle course between the errors of charging recklessly ahead on the one hand, and of being paralysed by fear on the other. The prudent person has good aims and goals for their life and is aware of the best way to achieve them. It is a deliberate and purposeful way of living.

As Christians we often talk about seeking God’s guidance, his will and purpose for our lives. Is there a tension between laying careful plans for the future and being led by God? How can we integrate these two approaches to life, and what risks could we incur if we don’t manage to do this? Do you have goals and aims for your life? Do you know ways of working towards them? What about us as a church?

Matthew’s gospel has quite a bit to say about wisdom: what are the characteristics of the wise person, according to Jesus (Matthew 7:24-27; 10:16; 24:45-25:13)? What can we learn here about being prepared to face the future?

Some characters from the Old Testament were noted for their wisdom: Joseph (Genesis 41:33-41); Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-28; 4:29-34; 10:1-8) and Daniel (1:17; 2:20-23). What did these men have in common, and what was the source of their wisdom? Can you think of examples of leaders from our own day and age who display the quality of wisdom? If you can, then pray for them. If you can’t, then why do you suppose that wisdom is in short supply today? Pray for our leaders, that they would be open to seeking, finding and governing in accordance with wisdom.

Solomon is credited with being the author of most of the Book of Proverbs (1:1-7). Proverbs are designed to stimulate thought and reflection. Reading Proverbs 3:13-18 and 8:1-21, are there particular verses from these passages with resonate with you? If so, which verses, and why? What are the characteristics of a wise person according to Proverbs 14:29; 15:21; 16:16; 17:10, 27; 18:15; 19:8, 25; 20:5; 24:3-6? Are there people you know (or have known in the past) whom you respect for their wisdom? What other qualities or characteristics did they show? Thank God for them, and for the difference they have made to you, and pray that you can be that kind of person to others.

According to William Maina (*The Instant Gratification Culture* on medium.com), our society is shaped by the fast-paced digital world of the dot com era, leading people to expect instant results, quick fixes, and constant validation: ‘This pursuit of instant success often overlooks the hard work, dedication, and genuine talent required for sustainable achievements, resulting in a culture of superficial achievements and empty accomplishments…individuals may make impulsive decisions without considering long-term consequences or the true value and significance of their choices.’ Would you agree? How does living in such a fast-paced world affect you? What ways have you found that help you to slow down, take time to reflect and to resist the pressure of the immediate?

‘O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgement, and light rises up in darkness for the godly; give us, in all our doubts and uncertainties the grace to ask what thou wouldst have us do; that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord,’ (William Bright, *The SPCK Book of Christian Prayer*).