

“Savvy – In The Know”

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UCC at The Villages
May 26th, 2013
1st Sun. after Pentecost

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

John 16:12-15

*‘With great understanding, Wisdom is calling out
as she stands at the crossroads and on every hill.*

She stands by the city gate where everyone enters the city, and she shouts:

“I am calling out to each one of you!” *Proverbs 8:1-4*

Let us pray... O God,

Grant [us] the serenity to accept the things [we] cannot change,

The courage to change the things [we] can,

And wisdom to know the difference.

Amen

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer

Did you ever hear the word, ‘savvy’ – as in a question: ‘You savvy?’

‘Do you know?’, ‘Do you understand?’

It is a colloquial word derived from the Spanish word, ‘sabe’,
meaning ‘to know’.

I first came across it in a collection of letters by the cowboy artist, Charlie Russell,
as frontier slang from the Old West.

‘Savvy’ meant a shared understanding between friends.

One of the best examples of what this concept means to me,

comes from a novel called, The Sand Pebbles by Richard McKenna.

It is about a US Navy gunboat on the Yangzi River of China in the 1920’s
when there were unfair international treaties

favoring European and American economic interests.

Aboard this gunboat, was a “coolie” system of Chinese nationals

who did the routine work of swabbing the deck, cooking, doing the laundry,
cutting the sailors’ hair, and cleaning the engine.

In this story,

one American sailor tries to teach one of these Chinese workers
how the ship’s engine works.

By doing this, the American was going against the prejudices of his shipmates,
who didn’t think a Chinese ‘coolie’ could learn the mechanics of the ship.

The sailor used metaphors to teach how the steam engine worked –

“live steam” started in the boiler, tracing its path through a series of pipes
to push the pistons until it condensed as water, or “dead steam”.

By breaking it down this way, the Chinese worker was able to get it –

a joyous scene for both student and teacher!

Willard, p.2

That way of breaking down scientific concepts into simple recognizable imagery was helpful when I studied engineering sciences at the US Military Academy, and it really helped to have a classmate who “savvied” engineering. For me, the most-difficult-course of instruction was Thermodynamics – and it so happens, one of our church members taught this course at West Point, the same years I attended. I never had the opportunity to be in Jeff Madsen’s Thermo class – and that’s probably because he taught the higher echelons of that course... However, I have had the privilege many times, in this past year, to attend Bible study classes Jeff has taught and teaching for us.

The other day I asked Jeff to define Thermodynamics in a few words
He said: “*It is the Science of energy flow and heat transfer.*
*Energy **in** equals energy **out**.*
Inefficiency is entropy – a mysterious non-physical thing.
It’s just this big blob...’
Which is about the same thing as saying ‘live steam’ in and ‘dead steam’ out.

Being able to understand – or savvy, the principals of Nature, such as:
*Energy **in** equals energy **out** while taking into account*
the mysterious misplacement of energy called entropy
has allowed our modern society to achieve
remarkable advances in the applied sciences of technology.
Our armed forces have especially benefitted from our superior technology with the most formidable arsenal and delivery systems in the world from nuclear bombs to drones, and even our individual soldiers are equipped with night vision, cellular communications, and body armor, besides state of the art weaponry.

As a US Army communications officer for a mech-infantry battalion, I was responsible for coordinating support and repair of radios and wire communications.
Later on, I was a maintenance officer for a signal battalion and my duties included support for more complex communications and automotives as well.
I found the most helpful principal to understand – to savvy, that is, was to remember that the world does not function by the whims of fate, but operates by cause and effect.
If something doesn’t work – there’s a reason why and if there’s a will, there will be a way to fix it by finding the right part, tool, or person – and if not, then know the reason “why not?”

Willard, p.3

A quote from The Sand Pebbles puts it this way:

*All machinery cared about a man was what he knew
and what he could do with his two hands,
and nobody could fool it on those things.
Machinery always obeyed its own rules, and if you broke the rules,
it didn't matter how important or charming you were,
you couldn't get away with it.
Machinery was fair and honest
and it could force people to be fair and honest.*

These laws of machinery essentially reflect the laws of Nature
set forth by God for a reliably functioning Universe –
and blessing or judgment follow by how well we know and obey them.

Of course, there are some people who jealously guard what they know.

Here's another quote from The Sand Pebbles:

*He knew them now by their very tone and manner.
They sat on a nickel's worth of knowledge
like it was the great Incan treasure,
and if anyone junior to them learned something,
they thought they were being robbed.*

Isn't that what the Pharisees try to do to Jesus in the Gospels?

Haven't we all had our run-ins with such people –
or been tempted to be that way ourselves?

I was fortunate to have had some generous teachers who taught me
that there is a way things work – and that way can be learned.

I learned to have great respect for warrant officers and motor sergeants –
those crusty characters who 'kept the train on the track'.

I learned from them that we can always find the reason why things go wrong,
and if there's a will, there'll be a way to get things going right again
or to know, why not – and that there's grace in that.

These experiences from Army motor pools and being deployed in the field,
gave me some insight about my faith and how the Holy Spirit is active
in the reality of wherever we are.

I found a confidence that there is a practical wisdom at work –
evident in our technology – which serves as a parable for
Nature's laws and even the laws of human nature.

That's pretty much what faith has come to mean to me –
that there is a "knowing" that comes from instinct and experience,
allowing you to trust even when you don't see the way at first.

Willard, p.4

This is not a blind faith that is reckless of risks involved
or irresponsible of the consequences.

It is a faith rooted in the confidence that God has provided for
the creatures whom God has created,
and that this world has been well-stocked
with the resources we need to deal with any situation.

At his farewell discourse to his disciples,

Jesus tells them that a Counselor will be coming to be their guide.

It can be argued that the Apostle Paul was this 'Counselor' –

but even so, Jesus is certainly speaking about the Holy Spirit,
which spoke through Paul – and is the Spirit of Jesus himself.

The Holy Spirit – this Spirit of truth corresponds to the proverbial 'Sophia'
of Jewish scripture, wisdom personified as a woman.

This Sophia/Wisdom is described as being present with God 'from the beginning'
just like the Logos or Word that is Christ, in the 1st Chapter of John.

Jesus – feminist that he was,

would in no way be threatened by this comparison with Sophia.

Throughout the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition

the role of men has been favored in scripture,

yet the perspective of women has been written in as well –
though that often means reading between the lines.

Now, even our military is finally coming around to recognize and respect women –
not only in their traditional roles of support, but also as combatants.

What if our war captains – in time, were women,

and bringing their unique perspective of wisdom to bear against brute force?

Indeed by my senior year at West Point – all the military academies respectively,
brought in the first women into their ranks

who would become commissioned officers.

What if the wisdom of women were to help lead to a third way
in responding to violence besides fight or flight?

These days, we are bombarded with news about catastrophic events

that appear to be caused by the capriciousness of Nature
and the senseless mayhem of humanity.

Though the reason why these things happen are too often a mystery to us,
yet they happen for a reason.

There are plenty of media experts who provide their testimony
to what those reasons are and who is to blame in such situations.

Yet, the key has always been to know the difference between truth and spin,
to practice discernment, to *savvy* the right way to go forward.

Willard, p.5

In our era of history, we have to work hard to listen past media sensationalism and the prejudices of our own hearts, to determine what is true, to savvy the right Way to go.

We have to approach any problem like a mechanic trying to figure out how to fix a car, with the confidence that we are not alone in that process.

What if people of goodwill – regardless of religious affiliation, could savvy the dynamics of that Sophia/Christ/Spirit of truth – however they wanted to call it, with a willingness to overcome evil with good?

As it is written in Zechariah 4:6,

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”

Reinhold Niebuhr was a Christian Realist theologian who contended against both liberal idealism and conservative naiveté.

Niebuhr was an active anti-Communist, yet he supported Martin Luther King Jr in condemning the War in Viet Nam at a time when our country was sharply divided between “hawks” and “doves”.

He was complex – yet from him came a Christian prayer with Universal application as if it were a thermonuclear dynamics’ formula.

Reinhold Niebuhr gave us The Serenity Prayer and this is a longer version, adapted to say ‘we’ instead of ‘me’...

*God, give [us] grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time, Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is, Not as [we] would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If [we] surrender to Your will,
So that [we] may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer

Energy in, energy out

with a little blob of misplaced energy that only God knows where it went.

You, savvy?

Amen.

Our first lesson is from Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

and characterizes Wisdom as being like a woman.

Recent trends in Christianity include this Jewish vision of “Wisdom” as a woman and as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit...

- 1 With great understanding, Wisdom is calling out
- 2 as she stands at the crossroads and on every hill.
- 3 She stands by the city gate where everyone enters the city, and she shouts:
- 4 “I am calling out to each one of you!

22 From the beginning, I was with the Lord.

I was there before he began 23 to create the earth.

At the very first, the Lord gave life to me.

24 When I was born, there were no oceans or springs of water.

25 My birth was before mountains were formed
or hills were put in place.

26 It happened long before God had made the earth
or any of its fields or even the dust.

27 I was there when the Lord put the heavens in place
and stretched the sky over the surface of the sea.

28 I was with him when he placed the clouds in the sky
and created the springs that fill the ocean.

29 I was there when he set boundaries for the sea
to make it obey him, and when he laid foundations
to support the earth.

30 I was right beside the Lord, helping him plan and build.

I made him happy each day, and I was happy at his side.

31 I was pleased with his world and pleased with its people.

John 16:1-15

[Jesus said,]

[1] "I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away.

[2] They will put you out of the synagogues;
indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you
will think [they are] offering service to God.

[3] And they will do this because they have not known [God], nor me.

[4] But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes
you may remember that I told you of them.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

[5] But now I am going to [the one] who sent me; yet none of you asks me,
'Where are you going?'

[6] But because I have said these things to you,
sorrow has filled your hearts.

[7] Nevertheless I tell you the truth:

it is to your advantage that I go away,
for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you;
but if I go, I will send [her] to you.

[8] And when [she] comes,

[she] will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness
and judgment:

[9] concerning sin,
because they do not believe in me;

[10] concerning righteousness,
because I go to [God], and you will see me no more;

[11] concerning judgment,
because the ruler of this world is judged.

[12] "I have yet many things to say to you,
but you cannot bear them now.

[13] When the Spirit of truth comes,

[she] will guide you into all the truth;
for [the Spirit] will not speak on [her] own authority,
but whatever [she] hears [she] will speak,
and [she] will declare to you the things that are to come.

[14] [The Spirit] will glorify me, for [she] will take what is mine
and declare it to you.

[15] All that [God] has is mine;
therefore I said that [the Spirit] will take what is mine
and declare it to you.