

The Great Pause

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March 15, 2020

This month we are exploring Wisdom from various points of view. Last week we talked about the biblical sources of Wisdom. This week, in light of the current public health crisis, let's talk about what wisdom looks like in our lives – how to recognize it – how to embody it.

How many times have you lain awake at night, thinking over and over about some upsetting moment from the day before, thinking “if only I'd done THAT!” or “I should have said THIS!” At such times we kick ourselves, thinking if only we were smarter or wiser we would have said exactly the right thing at the right time.

PAUSE

My father-in-law would often say to his children, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.” It's a quote that's been attributed to Lincoln and Mark Twain, but most likely, it comes from that famous philosopher, Anonymous!

It's an interesting quote, because it not only says to pause, it also says you get to control what happens next. Pretty empowering, if you ask me. I believe that in our normal day-to-day lives wisdom more often lives in those moments when we pause and choose not to respond to something immediately. (Our first reaction is not always our best reaction.) Wisdom grows from perspective and experience. It grows out of keeping a little bit of emotional distance from an event so that you can see the bigger picture.

How many of you remember being told that when you're angry, you should count to 10? Angry, emotional moments like that tend to prompt in each of us a primitive survival reaction. Biologically, we are taken back thousands of years to a survival response that isn't necessarily helpful now. Some call it an amygdala hijack, which is when the most primitive part of our brain, causes us to respond impulsively . . . sometimes thoughtlessly . . . rather than taking a breath, a moment, a day or two, to respond with greater wisdom and perspective.

I call it the Great Pause. Great because it's a big deal when we learn to pause before reacting. When we pause before speaking, acting, typing, . . . tweeting, it's a rare gift to our spirits and to the world. These days, it's a skill that too few know and as a result our society is becoming less civil and less welcoming to other points of view. But, it's a skill that each of us can learn, and in learning, model to others how to pause before reacting, assuming, or judging someone else. Why is it important? Because learning how to pause is essential to healthy living, relationships, and humanity.

The Great Pause also applies when we are dealing with big issues like we are now. When early warnings first came to us about Covid-19, we were busy living our lives, commuting to work, working long hours, taking care of our families and others, paying bills, helping our communities, shopping, serving the church, doing things that fed our spirits and bodies, doing .

. . doing . . . doing. We didn't have much bandwidth to think of doing things any other way. We couldn't imagine! how we could pause our doing, even for good reasons. Slowly, it's dawned on us, not just individually, but globally, that for everyone's sake, our own, as well as our loved ones and all others, we must begin the Great Pause . . . perhaps the greatest pause of our lives. Now is the time to take a pause in the way we do things so that as a human race we save all the lives we can. Now is the time to practice the wisdom of seeing the bigger picture, the bigger perspective, the larger message, the greatness of Love that can, if we open our hearts, heal us.

May it be so.