



# SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Sunday, November 12, 2017  
Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, Little Rock  
The Reverend Patricia Matthews*

Imagine this, you come home from work, plop down on the couch, turn on the tv, and settle in - for 12 exhilarating hours of watching, real-time, a fire burning in a fireplace. That's the idea behind the Slow TV movement that has taken Norway by storm in the last decade.

But wait, the fun doesn't stop there. On top of this National Firewood Night, there's also National Knitting Night, a 13-hour tv show that begins with sheering sheep and ends with knitting a sweater.

¼ of all Norwegians tuned in for a show that simply filmed a train going down the tracks - for 7 hours. And ½ of all Norwegians watched at least some part of the broadcast of a cruise ship going down a river - for 5 ½ days straight. It was – riveting?

To top it all off, the non-stop, commercial-free, 18-hour show that followed salmon swimming upstream was slammed for being “too short.”

To us, in the hurried US, watching these shows may sound like almost as much fun as watching paint dry – which, now that I think about it, could very well be their next 16-hour program. But Norwegians – man, have they become fascinated with this type of TV.

Professor Epsen Ytreberg, who teaches Media Studies at the University of Oslo, says this type of viewing “requires us precisely to slow down, to kind of twist our heads in a little bit of a different direction.”

When viewers make this shift, they find something beautiful and unexpected. Instead of being inundated the news, or with the drama of movies, or with commercials trying to sell the next new thing, these Norwegian viewers are seeking out something else, something quieter. It seems very wise.

The church calls us to do something similar to what Norway did: to slow down, and to look in a little bit of a different direction from our everyday concerns, in a direction pointed toward the Wisdom that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven. Maybe we could call it Slow Gospel Wisdom. Not quite as catchy as Slow TV, but, it's what we've got.

In the parable we just heard from Matthew, Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. There are 10 bridesmaids trying to get in – 5 are wise and 5 are foolish – and it is the wise who get to go into the wedding banquet of the Kingdom. By making that distinction – between the wise and the foolish – we can assume that Jesus is interested in Wisdom, that he is asking us to tilt our heads slightly and wonder what being wise has to do with entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

To answer this, we must take a step back, and realize that the people listening to Jesus may have heard that word “wise” in a particular way. They may have heard “being wise” as being associated with a Spirit of Wisdom.

We can think this because there is a book in our Apocrypha called *The Wisdom of Solomon*, and in it Wisdom is portrayed as a force that has been a part of the nature of God from before time. She is said to have been working through the arc of history. She was there, moving over the waters of creation. She was in the wind that blew back the Red Sea during the Exodus. She has given council to the prophets over time. The Jewish tradition describes Wisdom, not as a separate force from God, but rather, she is a part of the way God reaches out to the world. This is not unlike how we Christians talk about the Holy Spirit.

So when Jesus talks about these 5 wise bridesmaids getting into the banquet, this understanding about the Spirit of Wisdom would have been in the room. The listeners might have understood that the definition of a wise person is this:

A wise person seeks the Spirit of Wisdom.

Now – to be clear - Wisdom is not a self-help acquisition. Wisdom is not some item to attain or to work really hard to get. It is not another thing to check off our to-do list. Rather, Wisdom is a Spirit with which to be in harmony.

Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis clarifies this definition of being wise. She says “the very idea of wisdom as the Bible understands it challenges the mind-set of our society and our view of knowledge. Knowledge for us is a form of power, used to get a job, to graduate, to know something others don’t – but knowledge in the Old Testament is not for professional advancement. Rather, the one who is wise aims at goodness, not power.”

Davis goes on to define this type of knowledge as *sapientia*. *Sapientia* is true wisdom and has an intrinsic relationship to goodness. And this is what we are called to be curious about.

Saint Augustine defines wisdom by saying that “no evil use can ever be made of true wisdom.” Other types of knowledge can and have been used for both evil and for good. But not wisdom. She is immune to manipulation.

And Krista Tippett, host of the podcast *On Being* and author of the book *Being Wise*, says all the wise people she knows find joy in the middle of difficult things. Wisdom breeds joy.

These are a few of the qualities of the Spirit of Wisdom that moves through our world.

And the gift of Jesus' parable is this: he shows us a way into the Kingdom of Heaven. We become like the wise bridesmaids when we put ourselves in a position to receive this joyful Spirit of Wisdom. It is a free gift that flows out of God's deep love for the world. And we find Wisdom simply when we are interested in being in resonance with that out-flowing.

And the book of the Wisdom of Solomon says this gift is easy to find, because here is something else: Wisdom is seeking us out, as well. She waits for us to find her. She waits on the path, at the gate, in our minds. She is waiting now for us to accept her and be filled with her joy.

God is longing for us to let this Spirit of Wisdom flow through us, hoping that we someday learn to set aside other preoccupations and stop seeking the next shiny object in this life. Wisdom asks us to quieten down and realize that today, just as we are, we are able and invited to participate in this Divine resonance with her.

When we enter this harmony, then the events of the world swirl around us, and we are able to stand firmly in the Kingdom of God and be wise. Our hearts become open, and we are filled with hope and compassion for all those around us. And surely God hopes for nothing less for us and for this world.

As we head back into our daily lives, maybe we can practice this Slow Gospel Wisdom, tilt our heads in a slightly different direction, and see something new. Maybe we can find Wisdom moving through our train rides and our cruises, our knitting and our burning logs, our fishing and our day-to-day movements. Then, we can enter into resonance with the Holy Spirit, where our joy will be renewed, and the Kingdom of Heaven will come a little nearer for us all.