

The Rev. «GreetingLine»
Stanford Memorial Church
October 15, 2006
Alumni Weekend

TIMELESS WISDOM

"The multitude of the wise is the welfare of the world."
~Wisdom 6:24

"The multitude of the wise is the welfare of the world" from the Wisdom of Solomon is a relatively unknown text found in the Apocrypha (otherwise known as hidden writings, which are not considered to be part of the authorized canonical Hebrew Scriptures/Holy Bible as we know it today). I uncovered it as I was thinking about our time together this morning.

You might wonder: is the multitude wise because it IS the multitude?

Or, better yet: The multitude would be wise or wiser if everyone agreed with me.

What exactly is the point of this little text?

It might mean that the world will benefit from the increase of those truly wise and pursue it even though it may not be achieved. So perhaps it seems right that a good word of encouragement is in order this morning, a word of courage as we undertake this timeless pursuit of wisdom.

Alumni weekend at this great university reminds us that this is one place where wisdom, truth, justice, virtue, generosity and goodness have been sought for a very long time. It is indeed timeless.

Every June we graduate yet another class of high-octane scholars (future alums) and many of you here this morning are counted among those. But despite the problems that bright minds are given to

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resolve, once you and now present generations of students leave these hallowed arches, we realize that problems in our world

continue and virtually increase year after year. I suspect many of you attended the forum on campus yesterday called Anxious Times.

The question is: what good is all of this knowledge and wisdom? Someone has suggested that colleges and universities hold a moratorium on commencements, stop the flood and see if things get any better because it might save lots of people from a tremendous amount of effort and work. It's also been said that a simple survey of our needs and a simply survey of what is possible to achieve might leave us in a perpetual state of spiritual deficit, and that there can be discouragement, if not numbness in the familiarity of it all.

Of course we won't stop holding commencement. Likewise, to people like us this morning, the word we need to hear and apply over and over again in this pursuit of wisdom and the welfare of the world is a word of courage.

We must not give up. As one preacher put it:
"Your turn, our turn, has just arrived."

While it is true that the search for wisdom does indeed require brains, we might consider that in the first instance it more critically requires courage and a willingness to carry on despite the evidence at hand, and the absence of evidence on the other. We pray and work for peace and there is still war on this planet; we pray and work on behalf of the homeless and hungry and many, many still go without; we pray and work for serious issues and problems to be resolved and there's

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still more than enough to go around. Should we just give up?

"Those who make up the multitude of the wise and no doubt add to the welfare of the world are people who love truth even more than their own possession of it," wrote one scholar.

"Timeless wisdom and the welfare of the world is managed not by those who impose impossible standards and an improbable timetable, but by those whose prayers and hopes are maintained against all conventional wisdom to the contrary."

The even better news is that wisdom is not a private possession but purposeful, public, corporate and collective. When I look out and see the pure evidence of all of you this morning, alums and people of all generations, past and current, I am deeply grateful and hopeful. You and we are the collective wisdom.

What do we do with what we know? This is where we all come in. As one writer suggested: "Timeless wisdom remains the means to what might seem an elusive goal, the welfare of the world. We call upon sound knowledge and right action." We continue to do what we can, not discouraged but rather encouraged by what it means to continue to truly live as a learning community, a community of faith and hope so that even in our reminiscing on this alumni weekend, we look yet ahead to that which has yet to be achieved. yet to be transformed. There is still wisdom and still time.

May God grant that we be added to that multitude of people who contribute to the welfare of the world by the grace of God and by the courage, imagination

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*and willingness of our own spirits. May it be that
the multitude of the wise is the welfare of the
world, now and in the days to come. Amen.*