

I spent some time this morning in Matthew's gospel, and I found myself returning again and again to the ending phrase of Matthew 11:19, "But wisdom is proved to be right by her works."

That's odd, right? If you don't stop to catch it, it's easy to assume that wisdom is proved right because it works. But listen to the difference: *wisdom is not proven right by her success, or her outcomes, or her results. It is proved to be right by her works.* As in, wisdom is in the doing, regardless of the outcome.

That is such a hard lesson, but it is a critical one.

This phrase comes at the heels of Jesus' comments about his current generation, which he compares to people who complained that they played music and sang and nobody responded. Then John comes, neither singing or dancing, and people say he has a demon. And then Jesus comes along, singing and dancing, and they call him a drunk and a glutton and a friend to sinners.

None of this makes any sense, which I think is Jesus' point. The 'generation' in this example is the crowd that is always dissatisfied with whatever is happening, whether it's drinking or not drinking, dancing or not dancing. We have all been part of crowds like that, groups that can only seem to find something wrong. It is exhausting and life-sucking and destructive.

Where does wisdom play into all of this? Wisdom does not get tossed about by the crowd. Wisdom does not have fleeting frustrations or convictions that change with the wind. Wisdom, in contrast, is proved to be right by her works.

Sometimes that might be

# On Wisdom Amidst the Crowd

drinking, or not drinking, dancing, or not dancing, eating with tax collectors or not eating with tax collectors. It's not the outward stuff—it's not some random rule, that guides wisdom. **Wisdom is knowing who you are (in God) and what you are to do (for God) and simply doing it. No matter what the crowd says or does in response.**

I get that this feels totally unfair. If we are going to persevere in wisdom, it would be nice to have something to show for it. But as far as I can tell, wisdom has

never operated that way. Wisdom takes the long view, which also means we cannot receive immediate confirmation that we are on her path. We will not get a golden ticket or immediate results or flaring lights. Most likely, those are all responses and reactions from the crowd, not wisdom.

**Our calling is to step outside of the mayhem and just keep doing what we believe is good and right and true and beautiful, in the quiet and unassuming way that good and right and true and beautiful things have always grown among us.**

The sunny side to this is that once we get released from relying on outcomes, we actually feel pretty free. We feel open. We find joy in the rightness of the work, despite the reaction of the crowd.

Wisdom happens by doing. Wisdom is proved to be right by her works. Another ancient manuscript has the word *children* instead of works. Wisdom is vindicated by her children...just in case you thought you would get this all sorted out within one generation. Wisdom is slower than that, but it's lasting, and that's something the crowds don't have going for them.

I don't know what to expect for us in the near future, but I do hope for wisdom to be our shared work, as small as it is, as insignificant as it may feel, as quiet as it may be. And I'm praying that I let go of my own need to be proved right and trust instead that in good time wisdom herself will be proved right.

May we do what we can to be part of that work—no matter what. □

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