There is something of a theme that runs through today’s readings and that theme is to not be stupid. And I know that the Bible does not use those exact words but it’s there if you look for it. In the Wisdom of Solomon, there is an exultation to seek out wisdom. In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, he tells the readers that he does not want them to be uniformed and, in the parable Jesus tells, the protagonists are labeled as foolish and as wise. And as best I can tell Jesus would like for us to be among the wise and not the foolish. Now, for purposes of this sermon I would like to narrow things down to just the verses that speak about wisdom and ignore the one from Paul that speaks about knowledge or information. And I do this because there is a difference between the two. Information or knowledge is the kind of stuff that will get us through an appearance on Jeopardy, but wisdom is something a bit different. And that difference is what I would like to explore in the next few moments.

I assume that most of us, if given the choice, would rather be wise than foolish but what exactly does that look like? From what we have today, especially in the Wisdom of Solomon, wisdom is explained as something outside of us toward which we should strive and, in some ways, it is even given divine characteristics. In what we read from Solomon the characteristics of wisdom are anthropomorphized and we are told things like, “she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.” So we now know that wisdom is important and that we should seek her out, but how exactly does that work? To help clarify I want to go slightly outside of today’s reading and go to the writings of St. Paul. In his first letter to the Corinthians he says, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom.” Or put a slightly different way Paul makes a distinction between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. So, putting the previous two things together we now know that we are to strive for wisdom and the wisdom for which we should strive comes from God. Okay, so, back to the question: specifically speaking, what is wisdom? To explain that let’s start on a human level and build our way up. There is an old joke which says that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit and wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Which is not a terrible definition on a human level. Wisdom is something that stretches beyond mere knowledge and incorporates things like experience and good judgement. But as we move to divine wisdom, we have to incorporate something greater and that something greater is God.

I don’t know how many of you have seen the movie Bridge on the River Kwai. The plot involves British soldiers in a Japanese POW camp during World War II. The prisoners are tasked with building a bridge to help with the Japanese war effort. The commander of the POW’s, played by Alec Guinness takes on the project with gusto to show his captors the superiority of the British army. Because of this motive he sets out to build the best possible bridge. Meanwhile a commando team has been dispatched to blow up the bridge because it will be beneficial to the Japanese war effort. On the day of the bridge’s opening the commandos have wired the bridge for destruction and are awaiting the moment when a train crosses to blow it up. Alec Guinness’s character spots the wires and sets about to cut them, so his beloved bridge can stay intact. At the last moment he realizes what he is actually doing, aiding and abetting the enemy, he then shakes his head and exclaims “madness.” In his pursuit of showing the enemy the superiority of the British Army he actually took up the cause of the Japanese. If you want it put in military terms, he was so focused on the operational level that he lost sight of the strategic level. Wisdom involves remembering the overall goal, which in this case was defeating imperialist Japan. But with the wisdom of God the overall goal is to bring glory to God.

I very rarely talk about the problems in the Episcopal Church largely because I think they are a waste of time but I do want to say something briefly because I think it speaks to Godly wisdom. As many of you know I was a member of the Diocese of the San Joaquin, the first diocese to leave the Episcopal Church. This happened in 2007 during my senior year of seminary. As is probably rather obvious I stayed in the Episcopal Church. I do not have just one reason for my decision to stay but amongst the many reasons besides stubbornness was what I perceived to be a lack of Godly wisdom on pretty much both sides. Both sides were so confident in the small thing they thought was the most important thing and forgot about why we actually come to church on Sunday. The idea of who was in and who was out came down to a binary choice. All of Christianity and the Anglican understanding of it was summarized in what one thought of the election of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. Everything became secondary to that. But to me that is not how life works. All of us have blind spots, all of us believe things to be true that are probably not true. The breakup of the Episcopal Church was largely fueled by the belief that nothing could be bigger than this one decision. Neither party was willing to step back from the brink and ask how can we stay in community, how can we work through our differences and remain the Church. And now we live in the wonderful world where people who used to come and worship together hate and despise one another all in the name of Jesus. And so I stayed not in solidarity with the Episcopal Church but largely because I think there is something greater than one argument about which the church should be concerned. I am not saying that the Episcopal Church was right but that taking your toys and going home or demanding absolute fidelity to an individual’s will is not Christian witness. I don’t know that I am wise but I think Church is about bringing together a lot of disparate people and uniting them under something greater than their small personal opinions. Wisdom is stepping back and looking at the big picture.

As I stated early on the wisdom, we strive for is not human wisdom. Human wisdom can often fall into the trap of being nothing more than what is good for me and people I like. That is what happened in the breakup of the Episcopal Church. People got to keep their exact beliefs and jettison anyone who might disagree. But Godly wisdom is greater than this. It is not interested in tribe but rather with the Kingdom of God. As we read in Paul human wisdom is foolishness to God. We are all foolish and the only way to be wise is to submit to God. The Church has a long history of being distracted by secondary things. As you may recall the first church crises dealt largely with whether or not you needed to be circumcised to be a Christian. Now I am not saying that some of these secondary things are not important, it is just that they are not the most important. And I think much of wisdom is knowing what is most important. And what is most important we will say in the Nicene Creed in a few moments – we believe in God, Father Son and Holy Spirit and all that. To have wisdom we must always keep that the main thing the main thing because we are human and humans are prone to stupidity that we call wisdom. To avoid this, we must always seek God and His wisdom so that we may be his own this day and forevermore.