

BRUSHSTROKE MEDITATIONS:

Lenten Gospel Reflections through Chinese Characters

March 11 – March 17, 2007

WISDOM / ZHI



Top Left: An arrow

Top Right: mouth

Bottom: a mouth exhaling

(which is written in the same way as the character for the “sun”.)

Wisdom is being able to express that which is sharp and reaches as far as an arrow. Penetrating and Deep.

This character is used with others to create words with related meanings:

	智慧	智叟
Pronunciation	Zhi hui or Jure hway	Zhi sou or Jure so
Meaning of single characters	Wisdom/intelligent	Wisdom/wise old man
Meaning when put together	Wisdom	Wise person/Sage

Lectionary:	March 11	Luke 13:1-9
	March 12	John 7:14-36
	March 13	John 7:37-52
	March 14	John 8:12-20
	March 15	John 8:21-32
	March 16	John 8:33-47
	March 17	John 8:47-59

When I was small and people asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, I always told them I wanted to go to college. I guess I was looking for knowledge. What would they have said if I had answered that I wanted to be wise?

To understand the Chinese idea of wisdom, it is interesting to look at one of the characters that is paired with “zhi” and also means “wisdom”, which is spelled “hui” when Romanized, and pronounced “hway.”



Top – two leafy branches

Middle – a hand

Bottom – heart/mind

Two leafy branches held in a hand symbolizes a broom, which is sweeping or clearing the heart/mind clearing the way for wisdom. There is a Chinese proverb that gives counsel on this: “People comb their hair every morning, why not their heart?”

In these two characters there is an encouragement to look deeply to penetrate all that is – seeing a situation or place from 360 degrees, or you could say “from all sides.” If we can cultivate a viewpoint that is far-reaching and penetrating, that takes as many people into consideration as possible, with the foundation of the heart, which is love, this is wisdom.

In the East, Wisdom is always tied to Compassion, and this is the way we find it in the story of the fig tree in Luke’s gospel. The fig tree has produced no fruit, so the owner wants to cut it down. But the gardener, knowing that trees need fertilizer, suggests keeping it for one more year and giving it the food it needs to see if it will produce fruit. Wisdom is never separate from Compassion.

Ideally, wisdom involves total perspective — seeing an object, event, or idea in all its pertinent relationships. Spinoza defined wisdom as seeing things *sub specie eternitatis*, in view of eternity; I suggest defining it as seeing things *sub specie totius*, in view of the whole. ~ Will Durant, American philosopher

One who commands our liking because of his virtue is called a good man. One who is sincere with himself is called a true

man. He whose goodness is extensive and solid is called a beautiful man. He whose goodness is abundant and is brilliantly displayed is called a great man. When one is great and is completely transformed to be goodness itself, he is called wise, a sage. When a sage is beyond our knowledge, he is called a man of the spirit. ~ Mencius (371-289 BC)

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ~ James 3: 13-14

There is a wisdom of the head, and... a wisdom of the heart. ~Charles Dickens

"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures." ~ Proverbs 24:3-4

Learning sleeps and snores in libraries, but wisdom is everywhere, wide awake, on tiptoe. ~Josh Billings