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The Wisdom of Crows
By The Rev. Rebecca Jones

I read the most marvelous story in the paper last week. It seems that scientists at the University of Cambridge have proven that there is some truth in one of Aesop's fables. Aesop tells the story of a thirsty crow who drops rocks into a pitcher of water to raise the water level high enough so that he can reach it to drink from it.

It seems that real crows do the same thing. In the Cambridge experiment, which was reported in this month's issue of *Current Biology*, some rooks, which are cousins of crows, were presented with a delectable worm floating in a jar of water just out of reach of their beaks.

But the real crows proved just as ingenious as Aesop's crow. They made use of nearby pebbles and dropped them into the water one at a time. Slowly the water rose and the worm with it until at last ...lunch arrived.

Oh, to be as wise as crows. They are among the smartest creatures in the animal kingdom, right up there with apes and elephants and dolphins. There is much to admire about a crow's wisdom.

As a species, we humans place huge value on wisdom. The search for wisdom consumes us. The very name of our species, *homo sapiens*, comes from the Latin meaning "wise man." We place great store by wisdom and we venerate those we perceive as wise.

In today's first lesson, we read about a king renowned for his wisdom: Solomon. When God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask what I should give you," Solomon didn't ask for riches or long life. Rather, he asked for "an understanding mind" so that he could be a good king.

God was so pleased by this request God not only gave Solomon great wisdom, but gave him riches and lifelong honor to boot.

Sadly, Solomon, for all his wisdom didn't always live wisely. We'll be hearing about some of Solomon's foolishness in coming weeks as we work our way through the lectionary.

But I guess that just puts Solomon in the same boat with us, doesn't it? How many times do I know something intellectually and yet I still do the wrong thing?

Having wisdom and acting wisely are not always synonymous, are they?

Then there's Paul. Paul was greatly concerned about wisdom and foolishness. Now in Paul's view there's foolishness and then there's foolishness. There is God's wisdom, which can often LOOK like foolishness to the human eye. But then there's plain old garden-variety foolishness which is the kind we often find ourselves mired in.

Paul says to be careful how we live; not as unwise people, but as wise people who make the most of the time we're given. He warns us away from too much wine and says we're better off if we *fill ourselves* with the Spirit instead.

Don't be foolish, Paul says. And how does the Bible define foolishness? Fools are bridesmaids who fail to carry any extra oil for their lamps. Fools build their houses on sand, not rock. Fools tear down their barns to build larger ones because the old barns aren't large enough to hold all their possessions. And they think they will eat, drink and be merry for many years to come, not realizing that they will die that very night.

Yes, that's what fools are, according to Scripture. Fools value all the wrong things, chase after all the wrong things, use their time doing all the wrong things.

By that definition, any fools present here this morning?

For a species that claims to seek wisdom, it's pretty easy to convince us to chase after foolishness...to believe all the hype...and so we scrape off the little house and build a bigger one to hold all our possessions.

Yes, we seek wisdom. But we rarely know what to do with it when we find it.

And then one day wisdom found US. Wisdom became flesh and dwelt among us. Wisdom came so that hungry and thirsty people could finally be filled.

But Wisdom said that the only way we can ever fill ourselves up is to empty ourselves; to engage in the sort of self-emptying love that holds back nothing, even if it means dying on a cross.

I read another story in the paper this week. The city of Birmingham, Alabama, is offering a blanket pardon to all the demonstrators who were arrested there during the Civil Rights movement. The mayor says he doesn't expect many to accept the pardon, but he thinks it's important to offer it anyway. Mayor Larry Langford was quoted as saying, "Sometimes saying you're sorry does more for the person saying it than the person who was victimized."

One of those who will turn down the pardon is Gwendolyn Webb-Happling. She's a pastor now. But in 1963, when she was 14, she was arrested and spent a week in custody at the Birmingham city fairgrounds, charged with demonstrating without a permit.

She says she doesn't want a pardon for what she did because she's proud of it. "We went to jail," she says, "to be free."

For it is in giving that we receive, and it is in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Whoever eats the bread that he provides will live forever.

As I've been speaking, I've been dropping rocks into this pitcher. And as you can see, the water level has been rising. If I just had enough rocks imagine how far I could raise that water. I could raise it so high that it would be within reach of any hungry or thirsty crow that happened by.

Let me tell you a thing or two about rocks and where they come from. I am the deacon at the St. Francis Center. I hope most of you are familiar with the center. It's a day shelter for the homeless, and it's sponsored by our church. We have Episcopal services there on Sunday morning, and we typically have between 300 and 350 in the congregation; which, by my reckoning, makes us the second-largest Episcopal Church in the city.

So far in 2009, we've served more than 6,000 men and women including more than 1,600 who are homeless for the first time. They come to the St. Francis Center for many of the same reasons people come to St. Thomas. They come because they're scared. They come because the things they thought would protect them turned out to not

be so reliable as they thought. They come because they're hungry, and they need to be filled.

At the St. Francis Center, we help people find jobs. If they're sick, we help them get well. We give them a shower and a change of clothes. We give them a place to store their stuff and a place to get their mail. We give them a safe place to be when they have nowhere else to go.

St. Francis Center has a few rocks to drop in the ocean of poverty. But if you have some pebbles to share – or maybe a few loaves of bread or some fish –we could sure use it because the need is so great.

But of course the Saint Francis Center isn't the only organization tossing rocks into this abyss of poverty.

I am also the Diocesan Jubilee Officer. Some of you are very familiar with Jubilee Ministries because, God bless you, St. Thomas IS a Jubilee Ministry parish.

Jubilee Ministry is a network of more than 650 social outreach ministries around the country, all of which are either located at or affiliated with Episcopal churches. In Colorado, we have 23 officially recognized Jubilee Ministries, including St. Thomas and the St. Francis Center.

Here at St. Thomas, you live out the gospel command to feed the hungry through your participation in the Interfaith Hospitality Network. And tomorrow night, I'm meeting with your Social Responsibility Committee to look at some ways that St. Thomas can do even more.

Let me tell you about some of the other rocks. There's the 32nd Avenue Jubilee Center, based at Merciful Savior parish in northwest Denver, working primarily with new immigrants, providing them with food, teaching them English, offering after-school programs and health care programs. And if any of you would be willing to stuff some backpacks with school supplies, they sure could use them.

There's St. Clare's Ministries located at the Church of St. Peter and St. Mary, where every Tuesday night we have a worship service followed by a sit-down home-cooked meal for the homeless. Each week, different parishes volunteer to come in and cook and serve. Your own Mother Catherine is the chief cook on the 4th Tuesday of the month. Every week, we serve about 150 people, many of whom would go hungry if not for St. Clare's. If any of you have put on some weight

lately and have some clothes that don't quite fit any more, the shelves in the clothing closet at St. Clare's have been awfully empty this summer.

There's Metro CareRing, the downtown Denver food pantry that goes through 2,000 pounds of food every single day. It's where you send all the food you collect on Loaves and Fishes Sunday.

There's St. George's in Leadville, a tiny little church with just 25 or so members. Yet four times a week, the church opens its doors to all who are hungry: three lunches and one dinner, every week. They serve about 50 people for every meal.

There are food banks in Estes Park, in Evergreen, in Sterling and Fort Morgan, in Cortez, in Colorado Springs. There are prison ministries in Denver and Canon City. There's the Colorado Haiti Fund, the Sudanese Community Church, the Boulder Episcopal Partnership with the Utah Navajo.

Rock by rock by rock. My one little rock doesn't go far. But when my rock is combined with your rock and your rock and your rock, we can raise that water level to the point that all who are thirsty can drink.

Be wise as crows, and little by little we will build God's Kingdom not on sand, but on a solid foundation of rock.