

The Brain – Having the Mind of Christ

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"The Human Brain" by David Lovins

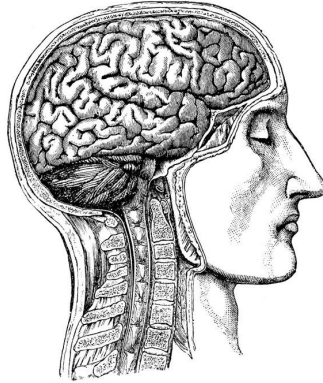
Prayer of Illumination

God of power and grace,
Fill us with the wisdom of your word
And the understanding of your Spirit,
So that we may be your church,
A people with compassionate hearts
And the mind of Christ at work in all the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Background

The human brain is mind-blowing.

Or as Bill Bryson puts it, nothing in the universe is as "marvelous and complex and high-functioning as the three pounds of spongy mass between your ears."



The brain is 75-80% water, with the rest made up of fat and protein. Your brain is surprisingly soft. Its consistency has been likened to tofu, soft butter, or a slightly overcooked Jell-O pudding. The brain is the most complex of human organs, and so it has the most named parts of any part of the human body. It is generally divided into three overall sections: the cerebrum, cerebellum, and the brain stem. We don't have the time to go into all the amazing parts of the brain here, but you can read more about them in Billy Bryson's *"The Body."*

Your brain burns about 400 calories a day—roughly the amount of energy you get from a blueberry muffin. Try running your laptop on that!

Your heart beats and your lungs expand, but the brain is ever still and silent in the dungeon of our dark skull. Sitting quietly, the brain churns out more information in 30 seconds, than the Hubble Space Telescope has processed in 30 years. There are as many neural connections in one cubic centimeter of brain tissue as there are stars in the Milky Way. And a sample of cortex the size of a grain of sand could hold 200 hundred exabytes of information—which is about the size of the entire digital content of today's world. So contrary to popular thought, you do use all of your brain, not just 10% of it.

We're learning so many things about the brain—but we're just scratching the surface. There is still so much mystery about the brain—things we don't know, and may never know, like:

- What actually is consciousness?
- What precisely is a thought?
- Why do we keep some memories, but not others?

And even as we learn more, we still know so very little about Alzheimer's. The brain takes up 2% of our body weight, yet uses 20% of our energy. For newborn infants, the brain uses 65% of their energy—that's why they need to sleep so much. Once you pass early childhood, you have all the brain cells you'll ever have—so treat your brain nicely.

It's also our most vulnerable organ. In fact the human brain is vulnerable to itself—to things like strokes and seizures that most other mammal brains don't experience. Strokes are the second leading cause of death for humans.

The brain takes a long, long time to fully form. Take for example the teenager's brain. It's only 80% finished. I kid not. Yet the teen brain cranks out more dopamine, the neurotransmitter that conveys

pleasure, than any other time in life. That's why teens are particularly prone to pleasure-seeking and being adrenaline junkies. The human brain isn't fully wired until the mid to late twenties. And thus, that is why car insurance for this age group is so high. As one neurologist has said, "The teenage brain is not an adult brain with fewer miles on it, it is rather, a different kind of brain altogether."

Which leads us to our Scripture reading. Paul says you have been given by the Spirit a new mind. By God's grace, you have "the mind of Christ." As we just heard, the human mind is amazing. But it needs divine help comprehending God. This passage was also chosen for Trinity Sunday because God, the Spirit, and Christ are mentioned throughout. In fact, St. Augustine used the brain as a metaphor to help us wrap our minds around the mystery of the Triune God. God is like the human brain and each member of the Trinity is like:

- the memory of the brain,
- the understanding of the brain, and
- the will of the brain

all working together, as one.

So let's hear now the Word of the Lord from:

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 (NRSV)

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him"—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

"For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?"
But we have the mind of Christ.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON: The Brain – Having the Mind of Christ

Do you want to know the secret to spiritual growth? Do you want to become a more wise, discerning, and mature person? Do you want to know the living God?

If you want to attain more wisdom in your life, don't pursue wisdom. Don't look to yourself. Don't look within. Look to God, and ask for the gift of wisdom from the Spirit. That's the key, that's the secret to wisdom. The cross. God's wisdom leads to a cruciform life—a life changed from the inside-out, by the crucified and risen Messiah. To the world and those in power, it's utter foolishness. That's why Christ was crucified. To us it is Christ, the upside-down wisdom of God, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found.

The very heartbeat, the touchstone of God's wisdom, isn't so much knowledge as it is love—love for God, love for neighbor, love for self. "Faith, hope, and love remain. But the greatest of these is love." No one practiced love more perfectly than Christ. So the Spirit has given us a gift—he has given us the mind of Christ. Each of us has been given a spiritual brain transplant. With the mind of Christ we're able to hear, and begin to comprehend more clearly, what the Spirit is speaking to us:

through Scripture,
through nature,
through people,
through books,
through our circumstances,
through prayer.

Divine wisdom is practical, down-to-earth. It's the art of skilled living and relating. With the mind of Christ and ears that hear we can increasingly discern and distinguish the right season and the right time. When to act, when to wait. When to be led, when to lead. When to speak, when to remain silent. The Spirit gives us the spiritual smarts to wisely consider and appraise our decisions and actions. With our minds illumined and our will empowered, we can be of one mind—the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ goes against the current. We put others' needs before our own. We die to our comfortable certitudes. We follow our conscience while bearing with others who think differently. With the mind of Christ, we can mind our gaps. Pastor and people can keep talking together—earnestly and sometimes passionately, forgiving and figuring out together how to follow Christ together in community, without walking over one another.

You see, what gives us hope is that God is the source of our spirituality and Spirit-filled life. It's all God and we cannot take the credit for it. Yet God still wants our participation. The Christian life is not merely a solo affair, It's to be expressed in the faith community, with Christians. Christ's wisdom is also to be fleshed out by Christians in the world, without being worldly. We allow the light of Christ to shine through us, to be reflected by us. But we have to keep going back to the important truth that God's wisdom is a gift. It's delivered to the door of our hearts and minds. Not by Amazon Prime, but by the Spirit. This gift of godly wisdom isn't earned, discovered, or created by human beings. Only God can reveal God. Without the Spirit, God's wisdom is inaccessible and impenetrable. It's easier to break into Fort Knox, than crack God's wisdom's code—without the Holy Spirit's help.

Paul uses an analogy to help us understand this. On a human level, I alone can understand what I'm thinking. You don't know what I'm thinking right now. I can tell you what I'm thinking with words, but if I don't do that, you won't know what's going on in this little brain of mine. We can't read people's minds. None of us has a crystal ball. I'll never know your needs, desires, hopes, or dreams unless you share them with me. Paul says God is like that too. God alone knows God. God alone can reveal God. On our own we can't read God's mind. God's ways are not our ways, the Good Book tells us. On our own, we can't figure out the deep things of God. We're in the dark, it's a total mystery to us what God is like, what God's will is, what God desires of us, and how we can really get to know God. It would be like trying to get an infant to study for a calculus exam. We're in over our heads when it comes to God. All of us.

We could have the creativity of Leonardi di Vinci, the genius of Albert Einstein, the philosophical acumen of Plato, Aristotle, or Wittgenstein, and still not begin to even scratch the surface of who God is apart from God's help. Human effort isn't going to cut it: not mental gymnastics, rational exercises, or years of sessions with your psychotherapist. None of these human attempts will enable us to comprehend or commune with God. But there's good news for all of us. "With God all things are possible."

So, if God gives us his Spirit, if Christ spiritually and supernaturally implants his mind into our mind, we have a whole 'nother story. It's a game changer. God's Spirit dives deep into the depths of God. The Spirit helps us to know and enjoy the wonderful things God has freely given us. This divine and mysterious wisdom can't be found in books or in a school or at a conference. We can only learn it directly and firsthand from God through our personal tutor and Rabbi, Jesus. We learn and communicate the things of God from God. This is amazing. Something we could never have conceived or imagined ourselves. And it has been God's plan from the very beginning.

We're described as a peculiar people in the Scriptures, meaning we belong to a different world order. We have a different way of doing things, a different set of priorities than the rest of the world. And the Spirit not only gives us wisdom, but the Spirit teaches us how to apply it, appropriately and wisely to our lives. God gifts us with spiritual sensitivity, spiritual awareness. But God's wisdom is like a pencil. We need to regularly sharpen it. We hone and mature our faith by becoming like a child, being reborn by the Spirit. It is only by believing in the crucified and risen Christ that we can really begin to understand what Godly wisdom is.

Another word for God's wisdom is the "mind of Christ." We've been given a new mindset, a new attitude, a new way of seeing and thinking and being, a new way of living and relating to God and to others. This of course doesn't mean that we know everything about God, that we've somehow arrived or are now spiritual gurus. No, we need to spend a lifetime maturing, growing in grace, and humbly walking with God through our missteps, trips, and falls. And so Paul reminds the Corinthian church and us: don't lose sight of who you are. Don't fall back into that worldly wisdom. Be who you are in Christ Jesus.

The church in Corinth was a tricky group to handle. They were a quarrelsome community. Paul spent a lot of time with the Corinthians (18 months) and wrote a lot of letters to them. We have two of them, but there were more. Corinth was the main crossing place going from the East to the West of the Mediterranean Sea. And so the city had many kinds of people—rich and poor, intellectuals and

manual workers, and was exposed to many different kinds of cultures and thinking. All of these combinations led to a cocktail of conflicting parties and interests—not only in the city, but in the church. There were legal fights, food fights over the Lord's Supper, sex scandals, gender battles, class wars, and partisan bickering: I follow Apollos. I belong to Cephas. I'm of Paul's school.

Well, I am a follower of Christ. Christ was being split up. Some things never change. The Corinthian church was drawn to wisdom. But it was the wrong kind of wisdom, a thoroughly human wisdom that led to relational messiness and spiritual chaos: arrogance, shoddy behavior, factions, competition, and division. Paul was called to sort out this mess. Brothers and sisters, I urge you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all be in agreement and there be no divisions among you.

Let me tell you about a different kind of wisdom, a new kind of wisdom. Not a human or earthly wisdom, but God's wisdom. Human wisdom makes human beings the center of everything. It resists God. We take God's rightful place. It leads to strife, division, and a party spirit. God's wisdom is rooted in the crucified Christ. And so the Spirit's work in the believer and in the church makes us more Jesus-y, more godly, and more human—just like Jesus. More forgiving, more united, more gracious. If you aren't looking, smelling, acting Jesus-y, it's not the Spirit's work being manifest in you or the community. God's wisdom isn't a head trip that makes you smarter or better than others. God's wisdom doesn't allow you to look down on others, but it helps you look out for others, and look to God for guidance.

God's wisdom gives you the spiritual wherewithal to be humble and serving and loving like the crucified Christ, even when it's not easy or fun. Christ thinks and lives and acts through you. You let Jesus take the wheel of your life. We think with the mind of the Messiah. The word Paul uses for this is *téleios*. Maturity. Completeness. Wholeness. Soundness. With the gift of the Spirit of Christ, the character of Christ rubs off on us and works its way into our thinking, speaking, and acting. Our conduct isn't at odds with Christ, it's in alignment with him. We're freed to speak the truth in love with candor and kindness.

But the world's wisdom is very different. Worldly wisdom makes you, well... more worldly. It puffs you up, gives you a big head rather than a big heart. It distances you from God and others, creates rifts. If the fruit of our lives is a crop of arrogance, division, factions, partisan fighting, personality cults, comparison and competition, strife, or jealousy, it's not coming from a place of God's wisdom.

Christianity teaches that you can tell the quality of your spiritual life by how you relate to others. We love God by loving others. How we do things is just as important as what we do. The Spirit reminds us we have one faith, one baptism, one Lord. We live into our union with Christ, our union with God, and our union with one another. Jesus is not only your Lord, not only my Lord, but he is our Lord. We share him together. We are the Body of Christ and we have the mind of Christ. Being a fool for the crucified Christ is God's path to true wisdom. It's the wisdom of foolishness.

Amen.

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