

20th December 2025

Wisdom

**“So, teach us to number our days:
that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”**

Bible, Psalm 90:12

An old Swahili proverb which I came across recently reminds us of this:

Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it.

The baobab tree – often referred to as “the Tree of Life” because of its ability to store water for sustenance in searing heat – is known for the vastness of its trunk and its extensive root system. The Swahili proverb, therefore, underscores the importance of community in African culture, where wisdom is communal, and never in the hands of one person alone.

Whatever we learn in Advent, wisdom isn’t an individual thing, no matter how much some may consider it to be. In any decision-making process, collaboration is crucial. Being aware of diverse perspectives in tackling complex issues is important. We are interconnected. So *all* our experiences can be valued and drawn upon. Learning from and listening to each other will deepen the wisdom we arrive at.

In our UK political system, we have “Government” and “Opposition”, metaphors of conflict and not collaboration. I heard a Conservative MP say recently: “It’s the job of the Opposition to oppose. It doesn’t matter what I think. Indeed, I might agree with what’s being proposed. But I can’t let that get in the way of opposing what’s being offered.” And doesn’t the lay-out of the House of Commons chamber give the lie to any concept of collective discernment, where the benches face each other, “two sword-lengths apart”, with two sides baying at each other derisively at Prime Minister’s Questions, for example?

If the baobab tree has a large trunk and extensive roots, might we accept that wisdom encompasses a wide range of experience and can’t be confined to one person, or one group, or one idea? A collective discerning of wisdom may take time, and compromise, and – dare I say it – the changing of minds. But is the collective wisdom arrived at not likely to be sounder than that which arises from confrontation or domination? As we “number our days with the Psalmist, with Advent taking us ever closer to Christmas, might we apply our hearts to *that* kind of wisdom?

A prayer for today

To listen and learn, to collaborate and not confront, is wisdom enough for any day.