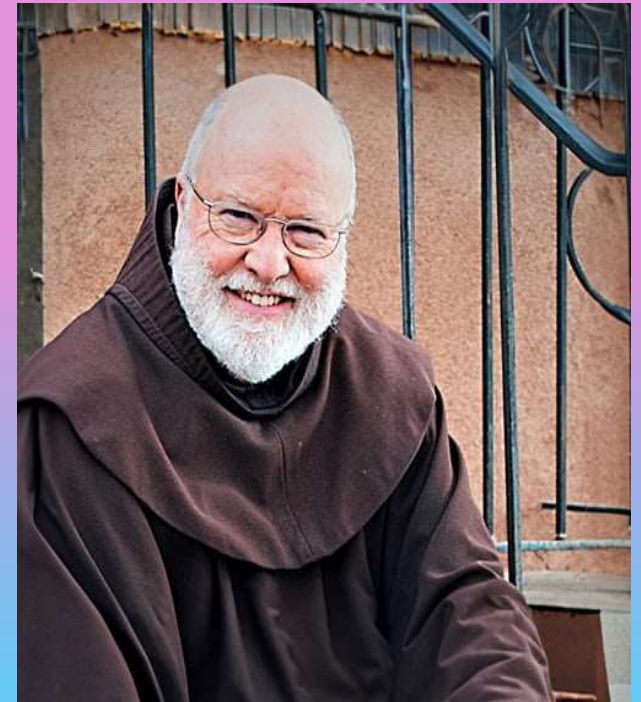


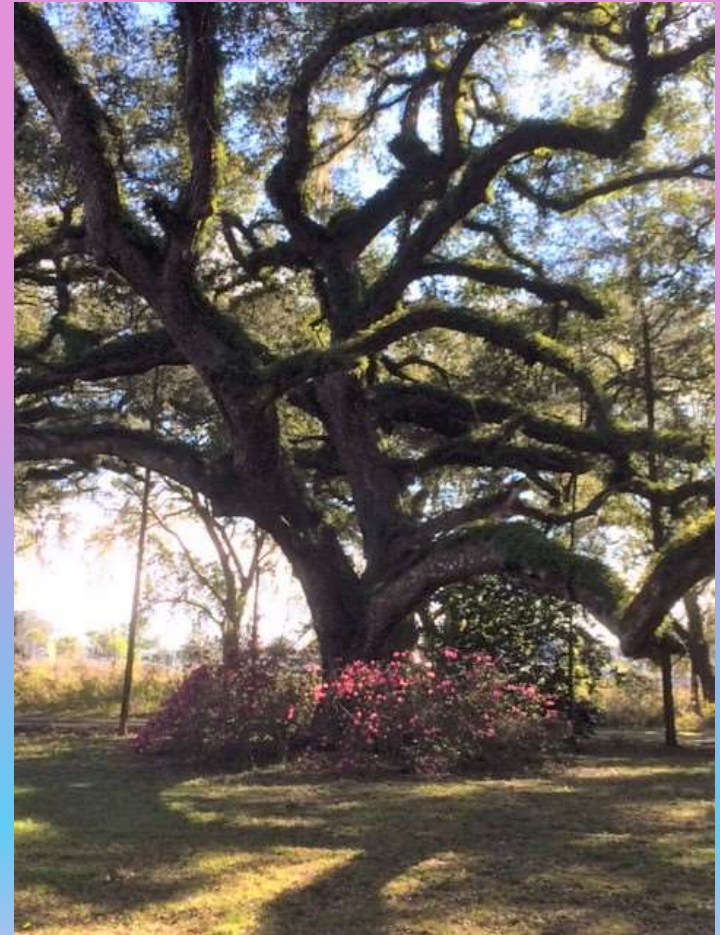
Chapter 16, Ancestors
Chapter 17, Wisdom



2. Ch. 16, Ancestors

There's a certain spot on this earth that is somehow sacred, the place where you come from, the place you never quite leave. When you think back to your hometown or home neighborhood, sometimes it's the very soil and mountains that you remember, the way a certain wind would blow through a certain kind of crop, perhaps the way a factory would scent the town

Always it's the people, the characters in the small dramatic panorama that was, when you were a child, your whole life.



3. Returning Home to Understand Ourselves



- We live our childhoods at least twice.
- First , we live through them with eyes of wonderment
- Later in life we have to revisit them to understand what it all meant.
- Artists often return to childhood homes for spiritual nourishment
- Searching for explanations for why they are as they are

4. Zora Neal Hurston – *How the Dead Showed Up*

- Hurston had the strength to do what she did because she knew where she came from
- She knew the legacy her ancestors had left to her
- The many ways the long dead showed up in her life



4A. Part of a Long Movement



- **Edmund Burke** once wrote *“People will not look forward to posterity who never look back to their ancestors.”*
- Each person’s consciousness is formed by all the choices of her ancestors, going back centuries
- part of a long movement, a transmission from one generation to another
- We can only be seen rightly as part of that movement.

5. Lazy Thinking

- **Hurston** - lazy thinking classifies others according to their group.
- **Reductionism** – avoiding the complexity of a given human being by summing them up by a socially constructed category
- **RESULT: Reification** –Seeing people as a thing (res, Latin)
- **Identity politics**- constantly reducing people to their categories : Black / white , gay / straight , Republican / Democrat .
- A first-class way to dehumanize others and not see individuals



6. Hurston's Solution

- **Hurston's example** – what does the true task of opening your eyes to others involve?
- *How do I see a person as part of their group?*
- *At the same time, how do I see them as a never-to-be-repeated unique individual*
- If we see a person like Zora Neal Hurston without seeing Black culture, that would be ridiculous.
- But if we see her only as a Black person, that would also be ridiculous



7. Fallacious Thinking



- **First great fallacy** - culture is everything
- **Second great fallacy** - culture is nothing
- Each of us can say, *"I am the receiver of gifts, a part of a long procession of humanity who came before"*
- But people are not passive vessels into which culture is poured
- Each person is a cultural **co-creator**, embracing some bits of their culture, rejecting others—taking the stories of the past and transforming them with their own lives.
- To see a person well, you have to see them as culture inheritors and as culture creators.

8. Tight v. Loose Cultures

- Cultural psychologist **Michele Gelfand** - tight v. loose cultures .
- **Tight cultures** - places where infectious diseases and foreign invasions were common.
- cultures emphasized social discipline , conformity, the ability to pull together in times of crisis.
- **Loose cultures** - places spared from frequent foreign invasion and frequent epidemics.
- Members tend to be individualistic, creative
- Civically uncoordinated, divided, and reckless.
- The United States is a classic loose culture.



9. WEIRD People

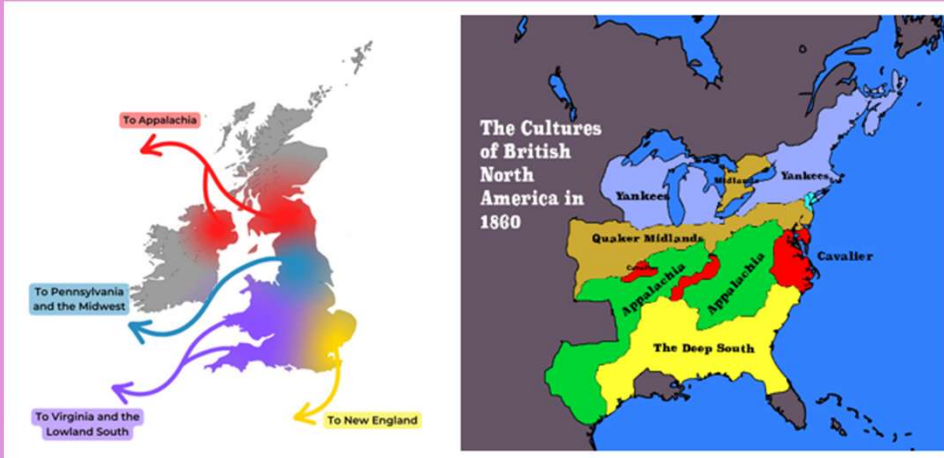


- Evolutionary biologist Joseph Henrich - **Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic** culture are complete outliers when compared to other cultures in world history
- nuclear families - dominant mode in only 8 percent of human societies .
- monogamous marriages - predominant in only 15 percent of societies .
- **WEIRD cultures** - less conformist than most other cultures.
- loyal to universal ideals
- less loyal to friends

10. Roots of WEIRDness

- Classical Greek culture emphasized individual agency and competition.
- Westerners tend to explain behaviors by what's going on inside individual minds





Eastern English settled New England

- highly moralistic,
- an acute awareness of social sin,
- strongly valued education
- very industrious
- highly time conscious,
- emotionally buttoned up,
- valued town halls and active in civic life
- like New England today.

11. Albion's Seed

Southern England who went to Virginia

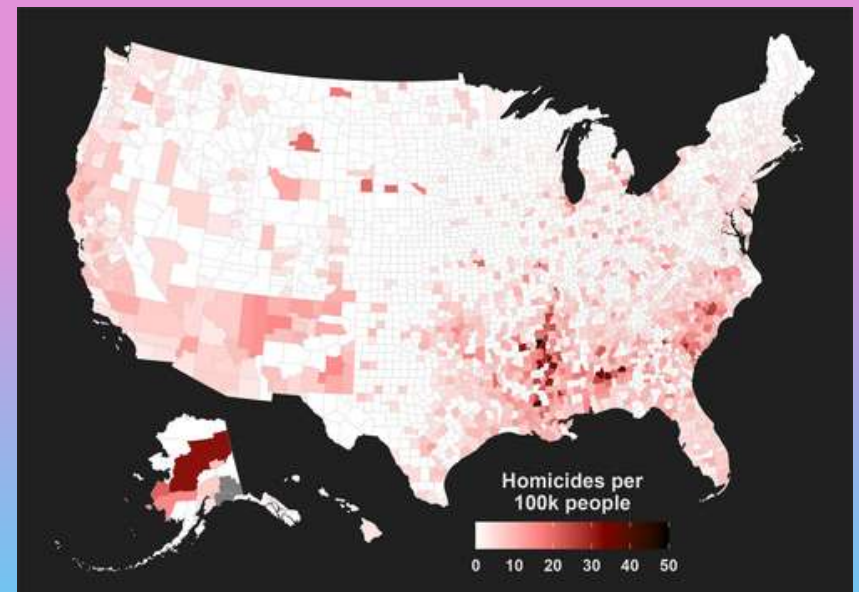
- aristocratic
- built palatial homes
- had extended patriarchal families
- liked showy and frilly clothing
- more comfortable with class differences
- less obsessed about staying on the clock.

Northern England/Scotland borderlands/Northern Ireland to Appalachia

- more militant Christianity
- ascribed to an honor culture
- more violent
- greater emphasis on clan and kin
- fierce pride celebrated courage and independence
- strong warrior ethic.
- Today people from Appalachia make up a disproportionate share of the U.S. military.

12. What Difference Does Cultural Origin Make?

- Murder rate in Massachusetts much lower than the murder rate in Appalachia
- 1980 high school graduation rate 90 percent in New England, 74 percent in Virginia
- New Englanders tolerate higher tax rates than people in the mid - Atlantic or Appalachian states .
- New England remains more communal and statist
- Appalachia and the South more clannish and combative: “we take care of ourselves.”



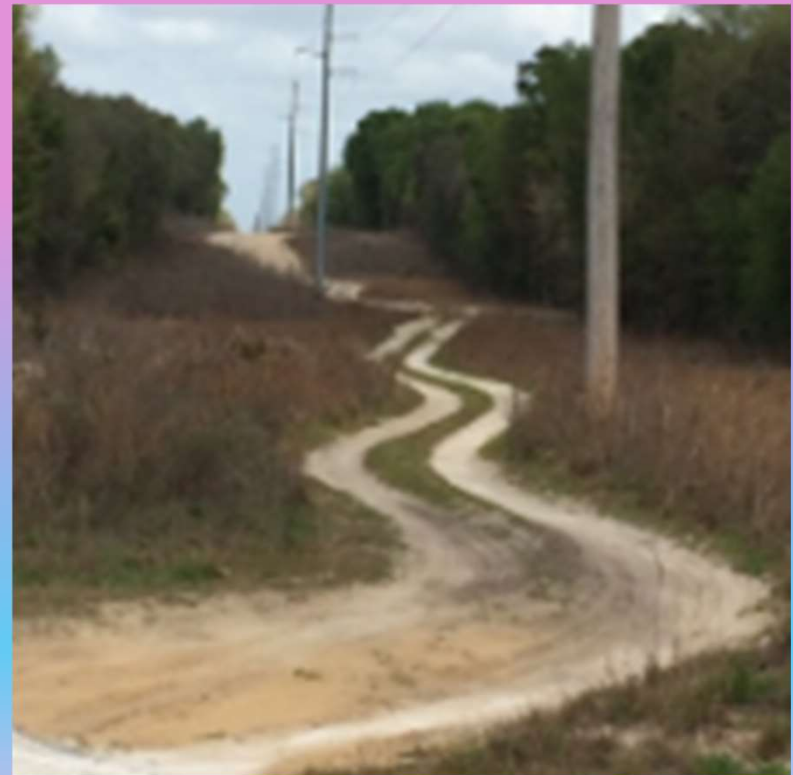
13. So, why is this important?



- Becoming aware of the deep sources of your Self means asking certain key questions :
- Where's home ?
- What's the place you spiritually never leave ?
- How do the dead show up in your life ?
- How do you embrace, reject your culture ?
- How do you see yourself caught between cultures?

14. All of Us Are Expressions of History

Novelist Robert Penn: “ *You live through time , that little piece of time that is yours, but that piece of time is not only your own life , it is the summing - up of all the other lives that are simultaneous with yours What you are is an expression of History.*”



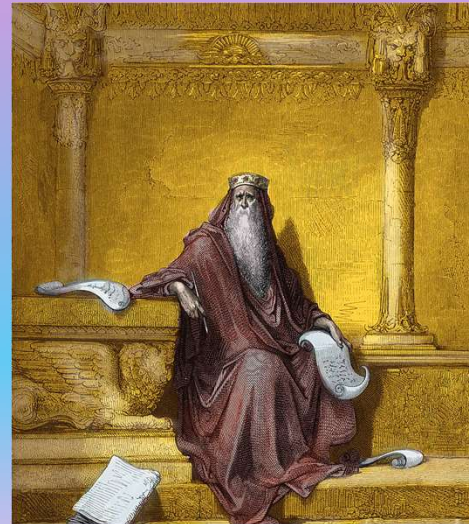
15. Ch. 17, Wisdom



- *Wisdom isn't knowing about physics or geography. Wisdom is knowing about people.*
- *Wisdom is the ability to see deeply into who people are and how they should move in the complex situations of life.*
- *That's the great gift Illuminators share with those around them*

16. Conventional Understandings of Wisdom

- **The wise person** - lofty sage who doles out life-altering advice
- *Yoda, Dumbledore, Solomon*
- The wise person knows how to solve your problems
- what job you should take
- whether or not you should marry the person.
- We like this version of wisdom - we all want easy answers delivered on a silver platter.



16A. – *Contra*, Brooks



- **Brooks** - when I think of the wise people it's not the people capable of delivering a sparkling lecture or dropping a life-altering maxim
- Wise people don't tell us what to do; they start by witnessing our story. They take the anecdotes, rationalizations, and episodes we tell, and see us in a noble struggle.

17. Confidantes, not Philosopher-kings

- The really good confidants — the people we go to when we are troubled — are more like coaches than philosopher - kings .
- They take in your story, accept it
- push you to clarify what you really want
- name the baggage you left out of your clean tale
- They ask you to probe what is really bothering you
- Their essential gift is receptivity , the capacity to receive what you are sending
- In this atmosphere people are free to be themselves, encouraged to be honest with themselves.



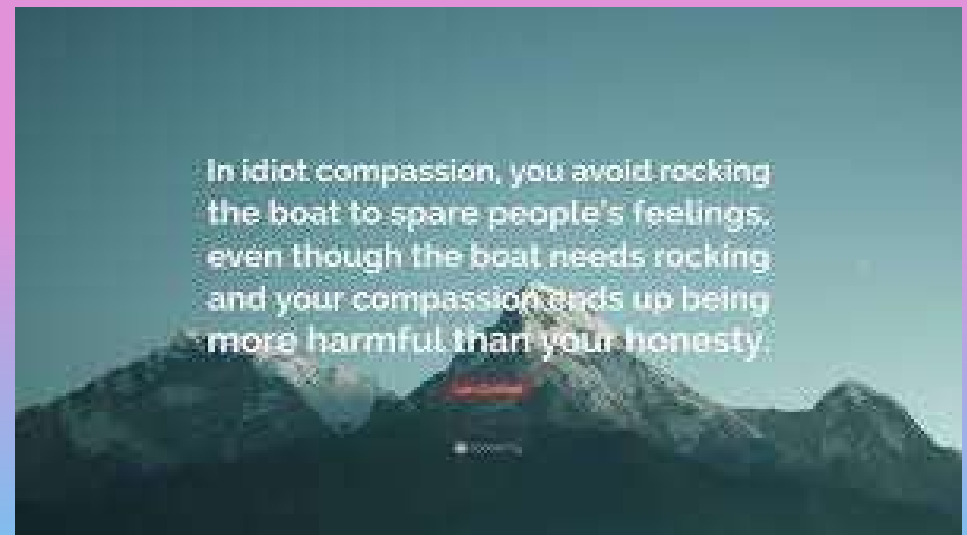
18. Knowledge that is Personal, Contextual



- The knowledge that results is personal and contextual
- not a generalization that can be captured in a maxim that can be pinned to a bulletin board
- It is particular to your unique self and your unique situation.
- Wise people help you come up with a different way with a different way of looking at yourself, your past, and the world around you.

19. NOT Idiot Compassion

- Buddhists have a useful phrase for unconditional positive regard: “*idiot compassion*”
- the kind of empathy that never challenges people’s stories
- or threatens to hurt their feelings.
- It consoles but also conceals .



20. It Takes Skill to be Receptive



- Skills it takes to be truly receptive
- the ability to be generous about human frailty
- to be patient and let others emerge at their own pace
- mental toughness sometimes required
- The wise person is there not to be walked over but to stand up for the actual truth
- to call the other person out when need be, if they are hiding from some hard reality.
- **Henri Nouwen:** *“Receptivity without confrontation leads to a bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to an oppressive aggression which hurts everybody.”*

21. True Friends – Delight and Mirrors

Friends not only delight us
and call forth our best

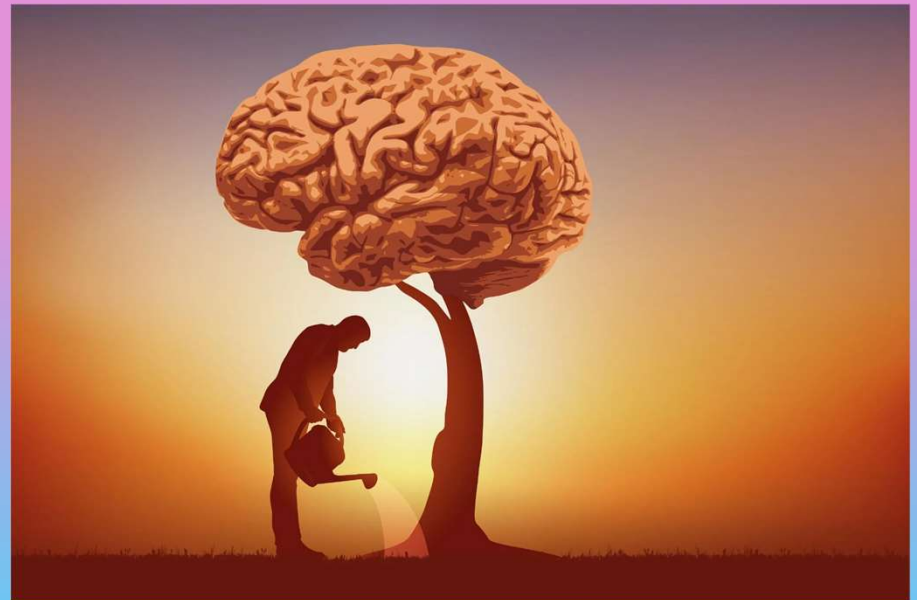
- Friends also hold up a mirror so we can see ourselves in ways that would not otherwise be accessible.
- When we see ourselves that way , we have the opportunity to improve , to become our fuller selves .



Randolph Bourne: “ A man with few friends is only half-developed. There are whole sides of his nature which are locked up and have never been expressed. He cannot unlock them himself, he cannot discover them; friends alone can stimulate him and open them.”

22. Wisdom is social skill, not individual trait

- Wisdom is not mostly a trait possessed by an individual .
- Wisdom is a social skill practiced within a relationship or a system of relationships .



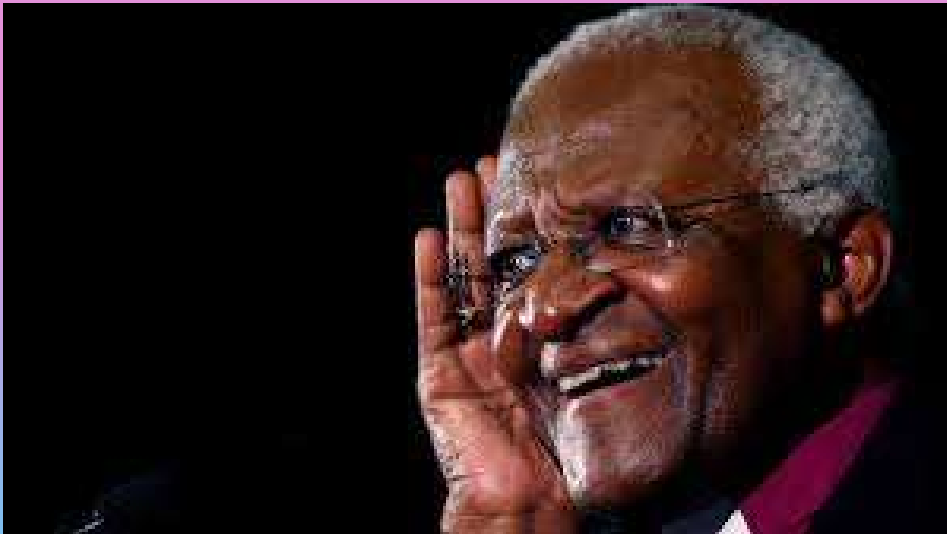
23. Communities of Truth

- **Parker Palmer** - *“community of truth... A community of truth is created when people are genuinely interested in seeing and exploring together . They do not try to manipulate each other . They do not immediately judge , saying , “ That’s stupid ” or “ That’s right . ” Instead , they pause to consider what the meaning of the statement is to the person who just uttered it. When we are in a community of truth, we’re trying on each other’s perspectives. We’re taking journeys into each other’s minds. It gets you out of the egotistical mindset—I am normal, what I see is objective, everyone else is odd—and instead gives you the opportunity to take a journey with another person’s eyes.”*



There are magical moments in a community of truth , when people deeply talk with crystalline honesty and respect

24. The Blessing of the Illuminators



- An Illuminator is a blessing to those around him
- compassionate awareness of human frailty
- awareness of the ways we are all frail
- gracious toward human folly, aware of all the ways we are foolish
- accepts the unavailability of conflict
- greets disagreement with curiosity and respect.

25. Acute Perceptiveness

She who only looks inward will find only chaos , and she who looks outward with the eyes of critical judgment will find only flaws . But she who looks with the eyes of compassion and understanding will see complex souls , suffering and soaring , navigating life as best they can.



26. DISCUSSION

- **DISCUSSION**
- **“How has your family’s story shaped the person you are today?”**
 - How do you see your ancestors’ values—spoken or unspoken—at work in your life?
- **Brooks talks about the role of “ancestral consciousness” in forming our identity.**
 - How might the Christian understanding of being “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) deepen our view of ancestry and legacy?
- **“Do you feel you’ve inherited more blessings or burdens from your ancestors?”**
 - How can the church be a space for healing intergenerational wounds?
- **4. Brooks talks about the importance of humility in the path to wisdom.**
 - How does our liturgy or theology teach us to embrace humility?
- **5. How can we cultivate a “wise community” in our parish?**
 - What would it look like for our congregation to value wisdom over status or success?

