

True Wisdom  
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz  
Date: May 22, 2016

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"True Wisdom" Pilgrim Church UCC, May 22, 2016, Trinity Sunday (Proverbs 8:1-4 and 22-31)

This morning we hear a rather mysterious passage from the Book of Proverbs about Wisdom. Lady Wisdom proclaims: "When he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race." [1]

Truthfully, Biblical scholars don't really know what to do with Lady Wisdom. There is widespread disagreement on whether Wisdom is a personification of one of God's attributes or is actually an independent divine being. [2] Furthermore, is the author of Proverbs saying that God had another child (a girl this time!) before the creation of the cosmos or is Lady Wisdom a preexistent being who aligns with God? If Biblical scholars are divided and asking all sorts of fascinating questions, it's okay if we heard this passage and wondered what in the world it's all about. What do we do with Lady Wisdom?

Well, we could see that God's creative work and presence is everywhere in creation, that our God lovingly crafted the mountains and hills, the heavens, and the waters for humanity to inhabit. And God delights in the human race. Keep in mind that Proverbs (like the Psalms) is poetic, so we can view these words metaphorically. Though the passage shows a God who is present and a God who cares about this created world with Lady Wisdom right by God's side throughout the process. Or Lady Wisdom being an attribute of God. As John Calvin once said, "Wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness." [3] Who knew John Calvin could be so poetic--perhaps contemplating the Wisdom of God brought out that side of him! Everywhere we look, we can see the glory of God.

On this Trinity Sunday, perhaps we can acknowledge that we are never going to understand God fully, that God will always remain a little mysterious. That we cannot understand all of the ways God works in the world or in our lives. There's a Christian chant in the back of our New Century Hymnal that's often sung when clergy gather together for whatever reason and the lyrics are: "Gathered here in the mystery of this hour, gathered here in one strong body, gathered here in the struggle and the power, Spirit draw near." Perhaps it's beloved because it so beautifully captures what we do when we gather to worship God on Sunday mornings. We are gathered here in the mystery of this hour, as one strong body in the struggle and the power. We are gathered here asking for the Spirit to draw near to us.

You see, we can hold onto the presence of God permeating everywhere and that God delights in the human race. But if we think that we understand it all when it comes to our Christian faiths--along comes Lady Wisdom in Proverbs to challenge us. Along comes that reminder that we are gathered here in the mystery of this hour. And so we gather with one another to worship God in awe and hopefully with some humility.

When looking at the state of politics these days one of the many things that can be bothersome is the lack of humility with all sorts of politicians. As opposed to being able to say that we're not an expert in everything and we would be relying on the counsel of trusted advisors for certain policy decisions, it's become all too common for politicians to behave as if

they're experts in everything--the economy, education, healthcare, human rights, the military, foreign policy--they know everything apparently! Not only is that lacking in humility, it's actually lacking in wisdom. Sometimes having experience, knowledge, and good judgment means that we know what we don't know. And knowing what we don't know applies to all of us--not just picking on politicians here.

It was comedian Craig Ferguson who once joked that it took him a few marriages to learn when to speak and when to remain silent. Silence is sometimes wise. Ferguson said, before we say anything--we should be asking ourselves three questions:

- 1.) Does this need to be said?
- 2.) Does this need to be said by me?
- 3.) Does this need to be said by me now?

If we ask ourselves these questions, we may find that there would be more silence in our world. We would better learn when to speak and when to just be silent. With all the political rhetoric these days, we may be longing for humility and for true wisdom. And yes, even for silence and listening to where people really are out of that silence before we feel the need to respond. Sometimes true wisdom and humility is having the guts to say that we may not be an expert in every area of our professions or even our lives, and we know that there's some things that we don't know.

It's not uncommon for people (sometimes you all) to ask me great questions about God and the Christian religion. Clergy obviously experience this all the time. Though sometimes the most appropriate response is "I don't know" or silence so that I can focus on what you're asking and where the question is coming from. We can then have great conversations about history and theology and what's going on with you--knowing that other folks would approach these topics differently than us. In truth, most clergy want to answer those tough faith questions to the best of our ability because who wants to say "I don't know" all the time or just be silent in the face of mystery?

When children are in the "why" stages of their development it's funny to consider how we human beings struggle so much to answer questions that defy easy answers. Why is the sky blue? Sure, we can answer that scientifically. Though not all questions have easy answers. Why do people suffer? Why is school so hard for me? Why are some kids really mean? Those questions are hard to answer and often silence just doesn't work.

Using our Christian lens, we know from passages like Proverbs 8 that God delights in the human race and God's presence is everywhere in creation. Though at the same time, God never promised us a rose garden. God delighting in us doesn't mean that we have it easy all the time. Just as there are aspects of God that are hard to understand (I mean what's up with Lady Wisdom?), there are aspects of our lives and our world that we will never figure out.

At the end of the day, perhaps we can be still in the face of God's mystery. We can perceive God's grace in creation and be thankful. We can actually be silent and listen. We can be humble and wise and realize that there are a whole lot of things we just don't know. We're not going to get this right all the time, we are human and this stuff isn't easy. But we can gather here in the mystery of this hour, gather here in one strong body, gather here in the struggle and the power, asking for the Spirit to draw near to us. And perhaps, just perhaps, we can hear Lady Wisdom speak out of that silence and get some courage to fight the good fight. Thanks be to God. Amen.

[1] Proverbs 8:29-31.

[2] Klein, "Exegetical Perspective of Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31" in *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3*, 27.

[3] John Calvin as quoted by Richard Boyce "Theological Perspective of Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31" in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 3*, 28.