

## ***Desperately Seeking Sophia***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

This is of course is a bit of Proverbs humour, but make no mistake, it is the essential message that the female personification of Wisdom delivers. We are to imagine the female companion of God out in the street, calling out to people to listen. Some are evidently not listening. Do you ever notice that the people who seem to possess wisdom are the people who are willing to listen to advice? They realize they need it. It is the ones who seem to have no common sense that think they don't need wisdom from people who can help.

The Hebrew word in the Hebrew Scriptures is "Chokmah", the character Wisdom in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Proverbs, the counterpoint to "Lady Folly" who appears in chapter 7, who represents the voices in our world competing for our devotion. Wisdom also appears 51 times in the Christian Scriptures, the Greek word "Sophia", describing more skills or knowledge that one acquires with learning, and life experience.

Joyce Rupp describes a delightful time she spent with her friend's 6 year old daughter, she says...

I was enjoying the happy child as she danced around the flowers, singing with glee. While I watched Elizabeth playing, something stirred in me.

Rupp was inspired by this moment to write a book when she made a connection between female "Wisdom" of the book of Proverbs and the free spirit of Elizabeth.

Only much later did I realize that the image of little Elizabeth playing among the roses was reflective of the beautiful passage in Proverbs 8 in which Sophia is described as being present at the beginning of creation: ..... "When there were no depths, I was brought forth when God established the heavens, I was there playing before [God] all the while" (Prov. 8:24, 30).<sup>1</sup>

What an interesting way to imagine the divine presence; playful and free-spirited. It was this female side of the divine that compelled me to put "Sophia" on the shortlist of possible names for our first child. There is a creativity inherent in childhood that becomes endangered as they grow up. Our 7 year old son, Benjamin, loves to scour the dirt for bugs. Yesterday we wondered where he was, looked out in the yard, and there he was, hunched over scanning the dirt for life. Wisdom in the Bible calls us to listen, to learn, but also to pay attention to the divine. What better metaphor for Wisdom, then, the voice of a child calling us to pay attention to the holy.

This is Trinity Sunday, how appropriate that the lectionary cycle has given us this passage, because this feminine Wisdom sounds to some scholars very much like the Holy Spirit; recall Jesus assuring his disciples that they would never be alone, for they would experience the Spirit mightily. And a mighty experience they got at Pentecost. Scholar Richard Boyce refers to an article he read about Trinitarian spirituality that said:

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Rupp. "Desperately seeking Sophia: The biblical Sophia is more than metaphor; she is an expression of the presence of God." <https://www.uscatholic.org>

On the road of life there are innumerable occasions for us to stand at the corner of 'Mystery' and 'Mundane' and see God at work in the course of an ordinary day.<sup>2</sup>

Wisdom can be about learning from life, learning to be logical, learning from life, as well as science and mathematics and, yes, music too (gesture to music director Bob). But, perhaps also Wisdom reminds us to make space for wonder that we might experience, even in the mundane moments.

I will admit to finding it a challenge to stay with mystery when life gets busy, when uncertainty looms, when facing the *slings and arrows of outrageous fortune* that Prince Hamlet spoke of in his famous tragic monologue. The voice of Wisdom cries out to us, not from a pulpit, but from the streets and back alleys outside this Sanctuary.

Wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures, and perhaps her Christian Scripture counterpart, Holy Spirit, await us as we leave here. Divine Creativity relentlessly coaxing us to colour our lives outside the lines that our world imposes on us. Holy Fire that ignites our souls when we witness injustice, her voice haunting us until we act with integrity and truth.

Wisdom of the Bible is far more than just knowledge & learning. Wisdom, at least as poetically presented to us in Proverbs, was around when God created the universe, and, I suggest, might be the very source of God's continuing creative work in us. As our lives undergo continual change, adapting to life and circumstances changing around us, perhaps the voice of Holy Wisdom and the Christ-presence are one in the same, guiding, coaxing, calling us to follow. But, we might ask how we discern the voice of Wisdom from voices of our world that lead us to destruction.

I think again about that image of meeting God at the corner of "Mystery" and "Mundane". Always making space for Wonder in life. Practicing Love as Jesus taught. Those are spiritual practices that are counter to our culture, yet they are essential to the teaching of Wisdom, and central to Christian faith.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Boyce, "Theological Perspective". *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Year C, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1*.