

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Wisdom

One of the wisest people I ever knew was a woman in my home town. She was unassuming. I doubt many people took much notice of her, but she happened to be one of my mother's good friends and a member of the church I attended. She had those thick, bottom of a glass pop bottle style glasses, as her sight was very impaired. I always liked her, but for a number of years, after being away and moving back to my hometown, and my mom and dad at that point living in Kamloops, I found myself hauling my toddler and preschool children over to her home in order to sit in her wisdom. This was a lady who kept a little chest of dinky toys in the bottom of the closet. Just enough to entertain my kids. That was wisdom in itself. And though my children would not have been able to articulate why at the time, somehow, they were always content when we went to see her.

She was what seemed elderly at the time. Getting closer to that age now, I am feeling like she was less elderly than I perceived. And though some may wonder why this particular relationship, I know it was her wisdom that drew me to her. When I needed someone to guide me and see me, I would give her a call, pack up the kids and spend an afternoon with her. Even after I moved away and then would go back to Spirit River to visit family, I made time to see her.

You might have noticed that though she was blind I also knew she could see me. This was not about her sight, but rather her insight, her wisdom. I grew to more than like her, I loved her very much. Her wisdom was a guiding light for this young mom and we grew to have our own relationship of friendship. She was one of my first mentors.

I continue to seek mentors in my life. They are not perfect people, but they are caring and compassionate individuals who bring light and life, wisdom and encouragement. I have had various mentors throughout my career, whether teaching piano, to going through seminary, into ministry and even now as I reach out to one for guidance as a leader and others for wisdom around preaching and teaching.

The Sessions and leadership teams that I work with in this presbytery are all people who bring wisdom and experience to our work and to my life. I am grateful for each one. To be honest, when we look for it, moments in our lives can bring wisdom from different people to various situations. Importantly creation itself has wisdom to offer us. Wisdom is something to be sought, appreciated, and integrated into our lives.

The collection of writings and thoughts in the Book of Proverbs is considered wisdom literature. It is a book on the practicalities of life and speaks in generalities. It speaks to how things usually work out; it does not speak to the exceptions to the rules of which

there always are. Proverbs is a book of wisdom that can be studied as a guide to living. It gives warning of what happens to those who follow the folly of seduction and greed, laziness, and even a loose tongue. It also shares the wisdom of God that, as the reading today says, was created by God at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago wisdom was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

And that seems to be the things about wisdom, it often comes with age and experience. Not to say that children do not have wisdom, they do, and often their matter-of-fact statements and observations of the world would be good for the rest of us to take heed of. But as I have aged and I have spent time with those even older than myself, I have seen and heard how wisdom comes from experience and observation. I often joke that I claim every one of my 59 years of age as it is only in those years that I have garnered even the ounces of wisdom I have and am able to share with those whose life experience touch mine and we share in learning together.

Human wisdom is important and is part of our being made in the image of God. The first four verses of our reading proclaim how accessible wisdom is to everyone – all people. Hear these words again, “Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?” And this is where wisdom stands on display and is present for all... “On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads, she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: ‘To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.’”

Wisdom is accessible to anyone and everyone. For humans, we are born with some innate sense of wisdom, but it is also acquired throughout our life times. Just as wisdom was created at the beginning of God’s work, so is wisdom in us at the beginning of our lives and then witnesses to our growth, reflection, and understanding over the years.

The other thing about wisdom that is wonderful as represented in the last verse of our reading is wisdom “was beside God, like a master worker as creation was being created. Wisdom was a part of all that was and is created, including us. Wisdom as a master worker is an interesting, brilliant, and hopeful image. If wisdom is a part of us being made in the image of God, then we too have the potential to be master workers in creating and being creative.

This creativity may come in the form of leadership, artisanship, musicianship. It may be creativity in how we raise our families and, in some cases, how one is viewed as wisdom and knowledge keepers for our families, tribes, and communities. It is certain that wisdom is to be sought, understood, and be life-giving as God is life-giving. Wisdom knows when people’s lives will be harmed and stops before that happens. Wisdom knows how to comfort people in their grief, pain, sorrow, and suffering in ways that are life -sustaining, if even for a moment. Wisdom does not look for the good of just the individual, but looks to and for the well-being and health of all.

Wisdom delights and rejoices in creation and in creating. Wisdom delights in the human race. So often people think of God as a stern parent, yet I like to think that our laughter

and tears of joy, our dancing and singing, are reflections of God's laughter, joy, dancing and singing. Wisdom is creative, delightful, a master worker. Wisdom is older than creation itself. Wisdom calls out to all that live, is accessible to all that live. It is not just for some but for all.

As you go from this time of worship, breath in the creation around you. Delight in the human race. Seek wisdom in others to guide you and reflect on wisdom for yourself. From the book of Proverbs, we know that wisdom has always been with God. From our experience of Jesus and the promise of the Holy Spirit we know that wisdom is present and always with us even to this day.

And when you watch or hear the news and all that is wrong with the world, as you seek to guide others and seek guidance yourself, as you make decisions about transitions in your life and that of those you love, pray that God's wisdom would be with you and others. As we seek to be communities of faith that witness to the creative, amazing, life-giving presence of God, may wisdom form in us and give us life, meaning, and purpose now and always.

I end with a reading I share from another author,

I was out shopping yesterday, and whom did I run into? Wisdom. Yeah, there she was. She called me over and we began talking, Wisdom and I. Then, I went down to the courthouse, and there she was again, making a plea for justice in some dingy courtroom where somebody had been unjustly accused. After that, I dropped by the school, and she had gotten there before me, calling for students and teachers alike always to seek truth. Then I went for a walk in the woods, moving along the trail in quiet meditation. Wisdom snuck up on me and said, "Now that we are alone, I have something I want to share with you, a present I want you to enjoy. You know, I have been around a long time, really before the beginning of time. I have been whirling and dancing with God all along. I am God's delight, laughing and playing. I want you to know the lightness of spirit and gladness that comes when you welcome me. Will you set aside those thoughts, words, and deeds that make life heavy and sad for you and others? Will you come and laugh and play with me? Will you come and dance with me? Will you?"¹

¹ Paschal, Jeff. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 3 Pentecost and Season After Pentecost*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P31.