

The Wise King: Eternal Wisdom – August 23, 2015

Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 (22)

Unison (print in bulletin) Proverbs 8:32-36

Baptism – Sadie Kathleen Cooper – print the unison response of the congregation in bulletin

Hymns; 1) #451 “Be Now My Vision” 2) #326 “Crashing Waters At Creation” 3) #556 “God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens”

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Come, seekers of wisdom and truth,

P: God’s wisdom has called us here.

L: Come, lovers of Christ’s teachings and guidance,

P: Christ’s love has led us here.

L: Come, singers of thanksgiving and praise,

P: The Spirit’s presence has gathered us here!

INVOCATION & LORD’S PRAYER

Great God, giver of all wisdom, pour your Spirit upon us, so that we may receive your wisdom and discern your guiding truth. Open our hearts and minds to love your teachings. Transform our lives o walk in your ways, so that we may live out our gratitude in all that we do, every day. In Jesus’ name we pray: “Our Father...”

THE SERMON

Our theme today is Wisdom – relevant right now as we get ready to send our kids back to school. We want them to be smart—of course! But I think what we REALLY want them to be, and what we ourselves want to be, is wise.

Last week, we heard about King Solomon, David’s son and successor, who asked God for wisdom before all else, and received wisdom and all those other things too.

And we made the acquaintance of the important but often overlooked Biblical character of Lady Wisdom in the Proverbs of Solomon.

From this book of the Bible we learned that Wisdom is not a small, passive, hard-to-find character. She goes to the center of the town square and calls out. She cries above the noise of the world.

What Lady Wisdom call out to offer is different from “worldly wisdom,” or street smarts, or intelligence. Many years after Solomon, we have teaching about the character of Wisdom from the prophets, Paul, and Jesus too. And what they have told us—reminded us—is that she is a creation coming directly from the being of God.

Those who ignore her calling and her advice will wish they hadn’t! Her words are essential to the life of faith. Those who do heed her call are those who acknowledge that they are “simple” and come emptied out and ready to learn – in Psalm 111 and many other places in the Bible we hear that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Her first lesson is that God is greater than anything we can imagine. Wisdom prepares us for God in a very real sense.

So we will think some more about wisdom today and for the next couple of Sundays!

In preparing to preach this today, I read the passage several times and then asked my questions about this text: First, What does it mean that wisdom is the very first of God’s creations?

This passage and others about Wisdom present her as a person AND a cosmic reality. While God’s own character is wise, and God is the author of all wisdom, this is a separate quality, a bridge quality between God and people. We are also God’s creation, made in God’s image, and Wisdom comes to us as an intermediary, always opening a way for us to approach God.

In the history of interpretation of this multi-layered passage, sometimes Wisdom has been seen as the feminine aspect of God. But for us, as Christians, the third person of the Trinity, the third way of understanding God, the Holy Spirit, is the one portrayed and characterized as feminine, dwelling within us and drawing us to faith.

So, Wisdom is a characteristic that comes from God but is not God. Wisdom is part of creation, as are we, but precedes us and exists on a different plane.

Wisdom is also not us. She is a kind of “consciousness” – a pathway that can connect us to the overarching being of God. Her presence, and the pathway she creates, remind us that we are made in God’s image, all right, but we are not God. When we forget this...we have strayed very far from the path of Wisdom.

My second question for the text was, What does it mean that wisdom rejoiced before God?

This gladness of wisdom is something we often lose sight of. We treat wisdom as difficult, or a gigantic burden, or something we need to study to achieve and pass some kind of test, a kind of downer, something that is in opposition to celebration.

But look at the ways that the Proverbs talk about her! Coming before us, she has influenced human culture when people pay attention and listen for her voice. Wisdom is ancient, part of the very earth, with some unchanging qualities. She can disclose to us the ancient truths, and the deepest realities that give us a framework to judge new information. Soon we’ll sing a hymn about how we have learned so much, even how to harness the energy of the atom for good and for ill. Wisdom is what gives us the framework to create, to discern, and to make the much-needed ethical decisions as we live into new and challenging times. Of course, that is, if we will listen to her.

And my third question: What does it mean that wisdom delights in humanity?

We know that wisdom is not seeking to oppose or kill off joy and celebration. Here, we see her delight in all that we create in our partnership with her! All of human culture is a kind of intricate dance with wisdom, coming close, moving far away, creating art and literature and poetry and movement, writing scripture and religious reflections expressing the truths that humanity has gained from wisdom.

And wisdom’s delight in us is again a bridge to God: WE may not understand how we fit into the bigger picture, how what we do affects the whole fabric of human existence...but God does. And Wisdom brings our minds into relationship with God and creation, so that we can see ourselves as existing and acting as God’s people in very embodied earthly ways and in spiritual ways as well.

The last question that I brought to the text is to wonder how it speaks to us and for us: What is wisdom in our lives?

First, there’s how it’s manifested. There are certainly a LOT OF SCRIPTURE references to wisdom, and to being wise. Wisdom brings insight. Wisdom begins with the fear – that is, the

respect—of the Lord. Wisdom provides understanding and guides humanity. Wisdom is a primary trait that God wants leaders to have.

Sometimes wisdom is with us, but when we go too far off the path, wisdom can leave us. Then, we cannot find her anywhere. You know what that panic feels like, we all do. This is why it's important not to say somehow Wisdom stands in for Christ. Or to feel that wisdom is something that we can get all on our own. Wisdom comes to us from God, and when God came among us in the person of Jesus, Wisdom came along. But from that time to this, wisdom takes a back seat to grace, the redeeming love that restores us to our right minds and right relationships, and shows us back to the wisdom path.

God created and established wisdom so that it might be put to use for God's purposes in the world. In Proverbs—next week, we will see the qualities and the signs that show that wisdom is present in what we do... what wisdom is FOR, so to speak.

Meanwhile—this week in our lives, time to ask a few more questions.

Where can we find wisdom calling out to us? According to Proverbs, everywhere. In all situations. She is not hidden away in the stacks of the library or in a sanctuary—although she can be there too! She's all over the place, loudly inviting us all in. So why don't we hear her? What causes us to forget to listen for her voice? Because we all do forget.

We get focused on our fears about the judgment of God. Or, alternatively, we get focused on our faith in our own judgment, on defending our own sufficiency, on proving to ourselves and others that NO WAY are WE the "simple" ones.

The hubbub of the square where God's wisdom is calling to us also distracts us. And it lies to us too: telling us that we can find wisdom at bargain rates, with no cost and no obligation. That hubbub makes the false promise that we don't need wisdom, or God, to live our lives.

Fortunately for us, the God of Abraham and Jacob and Moses and David and Solomon, made known to us in Jesus, does not ever give up on us. Wisdom is always available, but importantly, so is the grace to turn back onto the path. To change our minds. To trust in God's love and care enough to risk the change that wisdom demands. By the power of grace we can let go of feeling smart and self-important and in charge so that we can see where God is really leading us. And wisdom also reminds us that we can trust in God, and in the power of God's love, even when all else has failed.

So! Listen for the voice of Lady Wisdom. Begin to train your ear to discern her call over the clamor of the world. Create some quiet time and ask her to point, like a compass needle, towards God. What do you think? Maybe once a day, in a prayer time, instead of composing

prayers in our heads, what if we were all to listen for wisdom, and be open to where she is pointing---because true wisdom does point, always, towards the God who loves and saves us.

Let's end this time together by turning back to that unison reading, Proverbs 8:32-36. Join me and let's read together the words of wisdom:

*And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.
Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.
For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord; but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death.*

Go forth! And may God's Wisdom always guide you!