

Proverbs 8:1-11, 22-36

Today we continue with the book of Proverbs, which has been ascribed to Solomon along with Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. This book instructs us in the basics of life, passing on wisdom on how to live a good life by addressing issues such as economics, friends, family, parenting, work, sex and politics. And most importantly, Proverbs makes clear to us that true wisdom begins with fear of the Lord. If you recall last week's introduction, fear of the Lord, based on the Hebrew translation and interpretation of the word "fear", is more precisely translated as "awe and respect" for the Lord, rather than being afraid or terrified of God.

Proverbs teaches good morals and ethics while keeping the love of God at the forefront of those who value wisdom. In 1 Kings it states that "God gave Solomon unparalleled wisdom and understanding, exceeding the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the children of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men ... and his fame was in all nations round about." Solomon supposedly uttered three thousand proverbs and composed a thousand and five songs.

One of the themes of wisdom literature is that it finds value in framing truth dualistically. It often contrasts virtue-vice pairs: wisdom and foolishness; the wise and the fool; light and darkness; knowledge and ignorance; understanding and vanity; goodness and evil.

However, the problem with the Book of Proverbs is not the wisdom it imparts, but rather accepting Solomon as its author, poet, songwriter. The entire book is written in the style of Hebrew poetry and song, which would necessitate a very gifted writer, with plenty of free time. But, with all the glory and honour constantly being heaped upon Solomon by his subjects and surrounding nations, and the tending to the needs of a thousand or more wives, when could he possibly find the time to write?

The teaching in Proverbs, comes from someone who not only had a personal relationship with God, but clearly understood how obedience to Godly wisdom enabled one to live a just and upright life. It is not easy to comprehend how the man who wrote “the fear of the Lord is hatred of evil”, could be the same man who did so much evil in the sight of the God he professed to follow.

There are several examples from a later chapter of Proverbs which hold the wisdom of Solomon in juxtaposition to the actions of Solomon. “The rich and the poor have this in common, the Lord is maker of them all; Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity; Those who are generous are blessed, they share their bread with the poor; Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself will lead only to loss; Do not rob the poor because they are poor. The Lord will plead their case.” These pearls of wisdom hardly sound like a man who enforced slave labour. Solomon’s life choices did not live up to the wisdom attributed to him.

The Book of Proverbs sounds as if it had been written by a social reformer, not a king who imposed conscription, decreed the poor to forced labour, taxed the people to the breaking point and lived a life of luxury beyond the imagination of any other human being. The words and actions certainly do not concur.

The various words the Bible uses for God throughout the Old Testament, the pre-Moses titles: Elohiym, Adonai, Adown, and the post-Moses titles: Yehovah, Yahweh, are all masculine, while the word for Spirit, Ruwach, is feminine, as are the words for Wisdom and Understanding.

The nature of God is masculine, while the nature of Wisdom and Understanding are feminine. It is believed that Wisdom is the feminine aspect of God. One of the beautiful features of the Hebrew language is that every proper noun has a specific meaning and can denote gender.

In today's reading, the voice is entirely feminine. The actions in the passage are feminine. In Hebrew literature, Wisdom rejoices and dances. This passage is the story of creation from the feminine perspective. The Book of Proverbs is one of those books in which the feminine aspect of God reaches into the soul and touches the heart that desires knowledge.

God has imbued creation itself with wisdom, with order, with logic, with discernible design. Wisdom is both the means by which God created the

good creation and also the design that God built into creation. God's creation is trustworthy. We so often take for granted how genuinely miraculous our trustworthy, ordered creation is; the spinning space that is Planet Earth, a small orb of safety spinning through an unimaginably vast commitment.

The culmination of Wisdom's call is the dual promise: life for obedience and death for transgression. It is a call to holy living that consists in the search for wisdom. The New Testament identifies this search as the search for the true Wisdom of God: Jesus Christ. He said, "So whoever has God's Son has life; whoever does not have his Son does not have life." This is an important passage to consider when reading the opening of the Gospel of John.

The Creator Wisdom makes clear claims to deity (eternality, participation in creation, the uses of "I" and "I am"). Wisdom is also found identifying with the creation. Consider the extent to which John's gospel picks up on the story of creation and applies it to Christ. "In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that He didn't make. Life itself was in Him, and this life gives light to everyone."

This presents a pre-existent Word that is the agent of creation. The book of Hebrews presents Christ as the creator: "Long ago God spoke many

times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he made the universe and everything in it. This Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly. He sustains the universe by the mighty power of his command. After he died to cleanse us from the stain of sin, he sat down in the place of honour at the right hand of the majestic God of heaven. This shows that God's Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is far greater than their names."

Wisdom identifies herself with deity by using the "I am" formula derived from God's name in the revelation to Moses. It is significant that John's gospel, the gospel most clear on the creative activity of the Wisdom of God, would also be the gospel that makes the most use of the "I am" formula: "I am the light; the bread of life; the door; the resurrection and the life; the way; the truth and life; the true vine; the alpha and omega." This is no accidental pattern and Jesus did not make these claims without Old Testament precedent for the various types employed.

John's Gospel can easily be connected to Proverbs 8. Jesus is the way: "listen to me, for happy are all who follow my ways", the truth: "for I speak the truth and hate every kind of deception", and the life: "But those who miss me have injured themselves. All who hate me love death." In response to the Apostle Thomas' question how they could follow him if

“they did not know the way”, Jesus is the way. Those seeking him, find him, and those finding him, find riches and eternal glory. They find life.

Wisdom’s allure in Proverbs is that her call for everyone to embrace what is good, true, and just is embedded in the very fabric of the orderly universe God has fashioned. The wisdom we need for a well-ordered practical life, she reminds us, is entwined with our rightly understanding of the Creator and creation. Too often we have allowed the two facets of wisdom – the theoretical or contemplative life, and practical or active life to drift apart.

Thomas Aquinas, of the Dominican Order, believed the pursuit of wisdom is “more perfect, more noble, more useful, and more full of joy” than all other human pursuits, for, by it, we attain a ‘portion of true beatitude’ and approach the likeness of God. Beatitude means blessedness, state of happiness or nirvana. Aquinas believed our love for God and desire to serve God are manifested in the pursuit of wisdom, both contemplative and practical, and he enthusiastically taught this type of wisdom.

With the ancient philosopher Aristotle, Aquinas agrees that our desire to know springs from our sense of our own ignorance; we want to understand connections among things, to grasp their fundamental causes. This sense of wonder, or desire to “put it all together”, ultimately leads us to God. Aquinas transformed the ancient ideal of wisdom with

this idea from Scripture: “God, who is the creator of all that exists, descends to us in wisdom and love in order to raise us in him in friendship.”

Our love for God is not formed by “the repetition of certain kinds of acts; instead, its original and abiding source is divine grace, a wholly unmerited gift.” Wisdom begins with an encounter with God. In Christ, we see the beauty of the divine life and our desire to participate in that life is inflamed.

The Dominican vision of the Christian life is one in which an initial longing for, and love of, God is deepened and informed by diligent study and prayer. Thomas believed our love for God and desire to serve God are manifested in the pursuit of wisdom, both contemplative and practical. Wisdom begins and ends in wonder. When and if we do talk about wisdom today, we usually have practical wisdom in mind, the insight that is associated with a well-ordered active or practical life. In ordinary life, those we admire for wisdom draw upon a wide range of experience, are able to see what is obvious or significant in a specific circumstance, and thus can offer counsel or advice about how we ought to proceed.

The wise have a sense of perspective and proportion that others lack. As much as they may provide an answer to a difficult question or situation about behaviour, they also help us to step back from the immediate

matter and see it in relation to larger and more fundamental concerns.

John's gospel itself, which identifies Christ as the Word according to whom the universe is created and which invites each of us to "come and see", is God's response to this hunger in the human heart. For Thomas Aquinas, God himself is not just wise; God is in fact Wisdom itself.

Proverbs teaches us to focus our lives on wisdom: "Choose my instruction rather than silver, and knowledge rather than pure gold. For wisdom is far more valuable than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare with it." This is one of many instructions that Solomon certainly did not follow or live up to.

Wisdom is depicted as the first of God's creations, born before the world was created. It is through Wisdom that God creates the world with a certain order, and delights in it. God and God's partner Wisdom rejoice in creation. "I was the architect at his side", Wisdom cries out, "I was his constant delight, rejoicing always in his presence. And how happy I was with the world he created; how I rejoiced with the human family!" God not only created "me and all that exists", God rejoices in and is irrevocably committed to the beloved creation. God delights in you and me. God rejoices in all things great and small.

Amen.

PRAYERS FOR PENTECOST 3, JUNE 18, 2023

God of mercy and healing, you who hear the cries of those in need, receive these petitions of your people that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage as we pray ...

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

O God, strengthen and empower your church. Where it is weak or timid, raise up bold and courageous leaders. Support it with your gift of inner strength and peace. Guide our Bishops, Pastors, Deacons, Teachers, and Lay Leaders. Bless all who volunteer their time and gifts in various capacities to serve and sustain this congregation and its mission to support your ongoing renewing work in the world.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

Creator God, the earth groans when we do not regard it with loving care. Forgive us for polluting the water and the air, for stripping the land of its natural resources, and for prioritizing caring more about meeting our own needs and desires to the detriment of caring about the long-term health of the planet.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

How beautiful it is when people dwell together in unity. Help us appreciate the richness of gifts found in the diversity and differences among us; help to seek to understand one another and to work together for harmony and the common good of all.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

Holy source of hope, so many people are in pain today. Give us hearts of compassion, hands that heal, and lips that speak words of comfort and encouragement. Surround with your love all those in need, especially those we name aloud or in our hearts ...

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

We pray for the families, friends and the communities impacted by the bus crash of the seniors who perished or were severely injured in Manitoba this week. Comfort them in their loss and grief.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

We pray for the people in the Philippines whose lives are being impacted by the Mount Mayon volcano. Nearly 13,000 residents in the southeast of the country's main island have been evacuated from their homes.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

We pray for Pakistanis who do not follow the teachings of Islam. Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws sanction abductions, indentured servitude, and execution, with more than 50 people of religious minority currently being incarcerated, some facing execution.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

We thank you for the four Indigenous children who survived 40 days in the Amazon jungle in Colombia after their plane crashed, and for the joint work of the military and Indigenous communities to find the siblings. Comfort these newly orphaned children and their communities in their grief.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

As you walked with Abraham and Sarah, Moses, the magi, and all who follow your call, be with those who travel this day: pilots and truckers, cab drivers and train engineers, those on vacation and those on the road for work.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

Today we remember fathers everywhere. We give thanks for those who have given us life and love, that we may show them respect and love; those who have lost a child through death, that their faith may give them hope, and their family and friends support and console them; those who, though without children of their own, willingly took on the role of a fathering presence and have nurtured and cared for us; step-fathers who have assumed that role with love and joy, who have loved the children of another as their own, and created a new family; adoptive fathers, who have claimed the life of a child and loved them as their own, as a precious gift from God; new fathers, full of hope, long-time fathers, full of wisdom, and fathers soon to be; those men who have shaped our lives without claim of family or kinship.

God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

Compassionate God, we remember the many single parent families where there is no father figure present. We pray that you would surround them with a loving, supportive and caring community by which the lives of the children are nurtured, shaped and strengthened. God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

God, our heavenly Father, we give thanks for those fathers and men in our lives who have taught us, guided us, and lovingly influenced and molded us into followers of Christ our Lord. Bless these men, that they may be strengthened and be living examples of your love in their faith as Christian fathers. Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honour them always with a spirit of profound respect. God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

Alpha and Omega, you are with us from our first breath to our last. We give thanks for the faithful departed who now rest in your loving arms. May the promise of resurrection sustain those who trust in you. God of promise ... **Listen to our prayers.**

Life-giving God, heal our lives, that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds and offer you thanks from generation to generation through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

God in Community, Holy in One, make us one Body from many as we pray as Jesus teaches us, saying:
Our Father ...