

A Sermon By Rev. Jim Hickman
Corona United Methodist Church
May 30, 2010

Wisdom Calls
Proverbs 8:1-11

Does not Wisdom call,
Does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights beside the way,
In the paths she takes her stand;
Beside the gates in front of town,
At the entrance of the portals she cries aloud,
“To you, O people, I call
My cry is to you...
You who are simple, gain prudence;
You who are foolish, gain understanding...”

Proverbs 8:1-5

Okay Lady, I am listening. You are talking to me—I am simple, I am foolish; I have so much to learn. Teach me, I am listening.

This is some passage. Here, in strictly monotheistic Judaism we have an image of a woman that seems almost a deity. I don't recall any formula that speaks of the trinity as

Father
Son
Holy Ghost
And Lady Wisdom.

But here she is.

Hmmm. What we have here is the personification of wisdom. Wisdom is insight gained from experience. But we often talk about life's lessons, of life as a teacher. That is what is being described here. And it is being done beautifully.

Some of you know that a primary characteristic of Jewish poetry is a literary device called parallelism. In parallelism the idea of the first line is repeated in the second line in a slightly different way. It is a great way to define abstract ideas.

What is wisdom?

It is defined in the next line:

Understanding.
Does not Wisdom call,
Does not understanding raise her voice? (verse 1)

And this parallelism continues through the entire chapter 8:

On the heights beside the way,
In the paths she takes her stand;
Beside the gates in front of town,
At the entrance of the portals she cries aloud,
“To you, O people, I call
My cry is to you...
You who are simple, gain prudence;
You who are foolish, gain understanding...”

But you know, as beautiful as the poetry here is, the point it is making is what the writer wants us to see:

- Wisdom is available to everyone. You just have to listen, watch, observe/learn.
- What is offered is practical knowledge—the best way to live, the direction in life that will give you the most reward, the better way to settle arguments or cut a piece of wood. You don't have to invent the wheel—learn from the past, learn from others.
- Wisdom will teach you to tell the difference between what is true and what is false, what is proper or prudent or discreet.

I can use some of this. I could use some sound judgment in practical matters. I could use some help to keep myself from being misled.

We are familiar with the idea that wisdom is available to all. And we have a belief that as we get older we get wiser—we learn from our experiences. But you know, as I listen to others, as I read what people write I've found an increasing number of people who say they are older but not wiser. They are saying that wisdom does not automatically come with age. They are saying that they haven't learned much through the years. It ought not surprise me, but it does.

On the other hand, there are people like author, Margaret Atwood's observations about growing wiser with age. They were in an article I read some time ago. She says that in the latter stages of life

...you're supposed to have acquired some wisdom. It's also the part where you keep wondering when the stuff is finally going to turn up, because you don't feel wiser than you did at age 20. If anything, less wise; at 20 you knew everything; at 70 you're not so sure. (M. Atwood, "The Pressure to be Wise" *AARP* mag. Sept/Oct. 09 p. 30)

She made that comment in response to a request to be a part of a film project *The Wisdom Keepers*. She said the program's designers asked a group of older persons to respond to a series of question like:

When you were young, who was your favorite hero?

What do you mean by leadership?

What motto guides your life in tough times? (Ibid, pp. 30, 32)

She found it hard to answer these questions. In reading the article it seemed to me the questions they were being asked had to do with one's philosophy of life. Wisdom has to do with what you've *learned* in life. Atwood did answer the last question, "What motto guides your life in tough times?"

...*Gone with the Wind's* "tomorrow is another day" seemed barely sufficient.

"If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans" though succinct, is not a thing the young need to be told, they'll discover it all soon [enough on their own].

(Ibid p. 32)

She may have felt these were not quite the best answers, but they are both wisdom statements—they are things you learn by living life.

Toward the end of the article she did list several of the things she has learn in life.

They included

- The important things in life aren't things.
- We is a more powerful word than I.

- The human race has been through the bottleneck before. We can do this. (Ibid p. 33)

And then she said,

You've got your own list. Time to share it—though like a true elder, only when asked. (Ibid, p. 33)

I agree. I agree.

But you know, I've been aware of the fact that some insights I have learned in life is time dated. I noticed it several times earlier this year. I was thinking about a sermon, I was doing a lesson plan—and I thought

That issue just isn't an issue anymore...

The wind mill you are jousting with isn't there anymore—it's gone.

Times have changed.

And I realized I had to do several things:

- I had to bring my thinking up to date.
- And I had to let those who see the current issues differently than I see them/I had to let them speak, try their solutions/learn their lessons.

I have to do both. I said a few minutes ago that wisdom is not having to reinvent the wheel. But it seems to me sometimes we have to let others do just that so they will learn, so they will find solutions to problems and situations the way they are NOW and not the way they were when we were younger. I had a pair of parishioners in a church once who really seriously wanted the church to attract and involve younger people—young adults. Yet they would arrive for any event half an hour early and make sure everything was set up, the coffee was on, and everything was ready to go. They couldn't seem to understand that if you don't have everything set up it gives people a chance to help out, get involved, take ownership of the group or program. They were shutting out the very people they wanted.

Hmmm, maybe there is some wisdom in that.

Keep talking Lady Wisdom, this foolish ol' minister, this simpleton is listening.

Let us take a few minutes to reflect on what we've heard and seen this morning.

Amen.