Proverbs 8:1-10, 22-31
August 31, 2025
Ellen Crawford True

To Dance with Wisdom

Next Sunday, we will turn as we have for the past several years to the Narrative Lectionary. A lectionary is simply a guide for an ordered way of reading through scripture. This lectionary reminds us of God's ongoing love story with the people of God, as we move from one of the creation accounts in Genesis, through stories of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, and continue with many of the prophets before turning to the gospel of John in December. Before we dive back in, we will spend some time this morning in the book of Proverbs. [read Proverbs 8:1-10, 22-31]

What or who comes to mind when you think of wisdom? I might picture a sage with a long beard and a white robe tucked away in a tower, removed from the bustle and trivia of my everyday life. Or I think of Owl from Winnie the Pooh, the character Pooh, Piglet, Tigger and others seek out when there is a dilemma to be solved, such as how to get Pooh unstuck from the door to Rabbit's house when Pooh has eaten too much honey. And I think of a dear mentor, John Kuykendall, former president of Davidson College, who is kind, brilliant, humble, and quick to laugh not at others but at himself and with others. I have often said that he is one of the wisest people I know, and that I hope to be like him, even in some small way, when I grow up.

And then I am reintroduced to Woman Wisdom here in scripture. As you may know, she is a central character throughout Proverbs, contrasted with her nemesis, Lady Folly who is bent on leading humanity astray. Lady Folly's ways lead to death; Woman Wisdom's

ways lead to life.[1] And Wisdom does not stand removed from everyone and everything. She is not found strictly in an ivory tower or a monk's cell or even beside a pristine mountain stream. Here she tells us that she stands right in the thick of humanity, crying out to us in the middle of our very mundane, everyday lives.

There are so many voices claiming to be true, smart, and even wise. So many who tell us who we are supposed to be and what we are supposed to fear. So many—as one scholar writes—claiming "to speak for God."[2] Many of these voices sneer and even scream, seeking to dismiss, drown out, or trounce all the others. And yet, Wisdom is here, too, calling out to us to listen to her and to learn from her what it means to live righteously, in right relationship with God and one another and God's created world. All is not lost. Wisdom is not backing down or retreating to a solitary tower above and beyond the absolute mess that humanity seems bent on creating generation after generation. Wisdom calls to all of humanity. Still. Now. Always.

And she has been doing this since before time began, the text tells us. Wisdom was with God in the beginning, as a master worker, a holy architect it seems, helping God with creation and delighting in not only peacocks and sunsets and waterfalls, but in human beings, too. Wisdom danced alongside God as creation unfolded before her, and she frolicked with utter joy and delight. Unlike other voices who cynically want to bash or cajole us into doing this or being that for *their* sake, God's Wisdom calls out to us because—like her Creator and ours—she wants what is truly good for us and all of creation because she

---

[1] Proverbs 7:27; Proverbs 8:35

[2] Donley, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3, p. 30.

adores us. Wisdom is not naïve; she does not rely on easy platitudes or opinions. Wisdom is not satisfied with simplistic answers. Wisdom embraces questions and curiosity, humility and courage. While relying on Wisdom does not make life easier, I am convinced that listening to God's Wisdom does make our life better and richer, and yes, more faithful.

Each Sunday our lay reader offers a prayer before reading the first lesson. This prayer for illumination is so routine that we may have forgotten why it is there, and yet it plays a crucial role in reminding us why we're here and what worship is about. It reminds us that we need help understanding what it is God is calling us to do and who God is calling us to be through scripture. As our *Book of Common Worship* reminds us, we are "utterly [reliant]" on God's Spirit to understand God's Word. God has not turned us loose, free to make scripture fit our interpretation, to make scripture say what we want it to say. No, we are called to wrestle with and listen for what God's Word is saying to us, and we need help doing that. We need God's Wisdom; we need God's guidance if we have any hope of hearing and doing what God intends. The prayer for illumination asks for God's light, God's Wisdom as we read, hear, and proclaim the Word of God not so that we can pat ourselves on the back for our own brilliance in here but in order for us to begin to grasp how we are called to live and be and serve in God's embattled and beloved world. That prayer serves to re-tune our hearing, to re-orient us and remind us that we are listening for God's Word and God's will for us here and now. Like the prayer of confession, the prayer for illumination is included every single week. Every Sunday, we need to confess the ways we fell short of what God intends in the week just past and every week we need to pause and ask for God's guidance before we dive into God's Word.

This is why I was drawn to this text for this moment. As I heard it read in a different sanctuary in another country on warm June Sunday this summer, I found myself thinking of us here and now as we turn toward the fall and a new season of doing our faithful best to hear God's voice and follow God's Word.

We have always needed God's wisdom, but I'm not sure I have felt that need as deeply as I do in this moment. One of my favorite prayers for illumination reads: "Amid all the changing words of our generation, speak your eternal Word that does not change." Competing voices have reached a fever pitch, raising suspicions about what is true and what is right and what is best. If we have any hope of remaining faithful amidst the whirl of chaotic voices that threatens to engulf us, we need God's guidance, God's wisdom. This wisdom, this guidance is not dependent on whether it serves me and mine first and foremost. Wisdom has told us that she is concerned with righteousness, with right relationship within the human family, between humanity and the entirety of God's beloved creation, and between humanity and God himself. The God we worship above everyone and everything does not love me any more or any less than my neighbor down the road or in another nation. The God we worship loves the entire world, the whole of creation and longs to make that creation whole. The Savior we follow was born as an infant in poverty and obscurity not to gain human glory or to win at all costs, but to redeem creation and save us—all of us, by giving up his life at the hands of a brutal empire. In him, God chose to become weak, vulnerable, humble, and human to show us the depth of God's love for the entirety of humanity. As Paul reminds us, Jesus Christ "became for us wisdom from God."

In other words, Christ is God's wisdom embodied. Any wisdom we claim to have is measured by this divine standard, by Christ himself.

In this and any season, in this and any era, it makes sense to pause at the crossroads and pray for God's guidance, God's wisdom to help us hear God's true call above the din. Wisdom is calling out to us and delighting in us even here, even now. As we walk together into the days ahead, may God give us the power to listen, the courage to follow, and the willingness to dance wherever wisdom leads.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.