

***Wisdom Calls***  
***Rev. Christi O. Brown***  
***FPC Spartanburg, 8:45am Sanctuary Service***  
***Trinity Sunday***  
***May 22, 2016***

Proverbs 8:1-4; 22-36

*The book of Proverbs is a collection of short sayings gathered from different places and produced over long periods of time, similar to how our modern day proverbs have been passed down through generations.*

*Chapters 1-9 are the first of three collections of proverbs in this book. It consists of a series of instructions given by a parent to a child. In this passage in chapter 8, we encounter Wisdom personified in feminine form. Throughout the book, the voice of Wisdom is found opposite to the voice of Folly. Listen for how Wisdom calls us, how she has been around from the beginning, and the encouragement to keep her ways. Hear now the Word of God:*

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? 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...

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world’s first bits of soil.

When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

“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.”

*The Word of God for the people of God.*

***Thanks be to God.***

#### Prayer for Illumination

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

## **“Wisdom Calls” Sermon**

A proverb is defined as a short, well-known saying. Throughout time, all cultures have had their own particular proverbs. This book of the Bible consists of ones the post-exilic scribes recorded, that the Israelites had picked up over many generations from various places. We have our own in our country too. Listen to these proverbs and guess if you think they are from the book of Proverbs or a famous American.

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” 9:10*

*“An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.” BF*

*“As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.” 26:11*

*“A slip of the foot you may soon recover, but a slip of the tongue you may never get over.” BF*

They sound somewhat similar, don’t they? If you guessed the 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> were from Proverbs and the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> were written by Benjamin Franklin, then you are correct.

When I was on the First Pres mission trip in Haiti several years ago, we decided to study the book of Proverbs for our daily group devotions. One reason we chose to do this is because the Haitians are well known for their own proverbs. Haiti is a land of great beauty and of great suffering. It’s one of the world’s poorest countries, but it has a rich culture. By living in the daily struggle of extreme poverty, their collective wisdom has produced many proverbs, such as: “Little by little, the bird builds its nest. People talk and don’t act; God acts and doesn’t talk. And, the donkey sweats so the horse can be decorated with lace.”<sup>1</sup> By the end of the week of studying the book of Proverbs and listening to Haitian ones, our team

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.haitianproverbs.com>

was having fun coming up with some of our own as well. Ones like, “Beware, for the ‘benediction’ at worship in Haiti does not indicate the service is almost over.”

Proverbs in general can be fun and are full of good advice, and yet this is one of those books of the Bible that a lot of us think we can skip over. We read through Genesis, skim through the rest of the Pentateuch, read about a few judges and kings, read Psalms over and over, skip Proverbs, head straight for Isaiah and we’re done. Get ready for the gospels! Proverbs is sort of like the TV manual—you know you’ve got it and maybe you should have it around for troubleshooting, but you never really get to it.

So we might need to begin with a refresher as to what this TV Manual-like book is about. Proverbs starts off like a letter a parent might write to a child at graduation or when moving out of the house for the first time. The parent takes life lessons learned and tries to pass this wisdom along to the children, hoping against hope they’ll listen and avoid some of the mistakes the adult might have made along the way. In this case, as the parent begins to write down the lessons, Wisdom becomes personified in the feminine form, and becomes a character in the story. In Greek, Wisdom is referred to as Sophia.

In Proverbs, Wisdom is a form in which God approaches humanity. And as we heard in this passage, she has existed since the beginning of Creation, indicating Wisdom was no afterthought for God. And what I particularly love about Wisdom is that she shows up everywhere, and she calls out to each one of us to listen.

Notice all the places she appears in this passage: on the hills, beside the way, at the crossroads, at city gates and doors. She’s in all the public places, and she calls us, raising her voice and beckoning all who live to listen, watch and wait for her, and to follow her ways. This passage indicates that those who listen are happy and find life abundant, including favor from the Lord.

Wisdom has been beside God since the beginning, rejoicing in the Lord and delighting in the human race. And Wisdom pursues us, my friends. Isn't this amazing? Wisdom delights in us. Wisdom calls us. Wisdom is always beckoning, so renewal is always possible. Wisdom is easily found in so many places, including the busy streets. But everyone is walking by with their heads down checking their phones.

Wisdom appearing everywhere gives me hope, especially in the craziness of an election year, where Folly, the opposite of Wisdom in Proverbs, seems to be at the forefront. In contrast, Wisdom is an intuitive posture of truthfulness. It's a propensity to see things clearly and the ability to discern from right and wrong. Wisdom gives life. Reclaiming divine Wisdom would be a refreshing change in our political and social landscape. And this passage reassures us that Wisdom is present in the chaos.

Wisdom reminds us of the truthfulness of who we seek to be. She speaks to everyone, and every one of us has a piece of Wisdom in our souls.<sup>2</sup> Wisdom reminds us of the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

It's like these wooden floors here in our sanctuary that were recently refinished. One day after a worship service I heard two people discussing whether these were new or old hardwood floors. They were amazed at how good they looked and couldn't tell if they were new or not. It turns out these floors have been here for 90 years. They were just covered up with carpet for the last 35. Refinished, they now shine again like new. This is what the Holy Spirit does for our souls as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas M. Donley. *Feasting on the Word Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 2*. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 28.

The wisdom God granted us upon our creation is always inside of us, but sometimes it gets covered up with other things in our lives, like the dusty old carpet. But the Holy Spirit has the ability to renew and restore us so that we can shine again.

Like Nadege in Haiti. To give you background, Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. 80% of Haiti's population lives below the international poverty line of \$2 a day. Unemployment is around 80%. Haiti is overpopulated and undernourished. Much of the government is corrupt, and there is very little infrastructure. Raw sewage and trash are everywhere. 7% of their children die before age five, 42% of children under the age of five suffer from stunted growth. Very few people live past 60 years old. And there is approximately one doctor per 8,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

Nadege was born into this situation. Her mother abandoned her at birth because she didn't have the resources to take care of her. Nadege was passed along from distant relative to distant relative. Life was tough. Her prayer for daily bread was literal. One day when she was around 11 years old, she was riding in a tap-tap—a little pickup truck with benches along the sides that everyone rides in Haiti for transportation. As usual, it was extremely packed. When a young mother boarded the tap-tap, she passed her baby up the bench for others to hold. The baby ended up in 11-year old Nadege's lap. When she got up for her stop and went to hand the baby back, the mother was gone.

Abandonment was becoming a theme in Nadege's life. She was beginning to feel like the worn out carpet. But by the grace of God, things soon changed when Leon & Jackie, who ran Haiti Outreach Ministries, took her in around the age of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.haitiom.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Haiti-Facts-20141.pdf>

12. And although her life got significantly better, Nadege never lost her heart for abandoned children. Over a decade later, as a single 20-something year-old, she took in the first child in to live with her in a dorm room. The child was two years old and barely weighed more than a newborn at 10 pounds. Nadege, while teaching full time, nursed her back to health day by day. In the midst of all this chaos, responsibility and stress, the Spirit moved her to establish the House of Hope, an orphanage for girls, which now is its own stand-alone home caring for 13 girls, including a now-thriving 8 year old that began in the dorm room. Nadege has since finished her university degree in the US and now runs a Haitian primary school. I would dare to say she has tapped into the divine Wisdom inside of herself. And she did this from the humblest of beginnings with the smallest of resources.

Think about the wisest people you know. What makes them wise? What attributes do they share with God? What would you like to emulate about them? Very few wise people come from perfect conditions. Sometimes we believe we have to wait until the right time or perfect conditions to put our faith in action, but Wisdom urges us forward regardless. She calls us to claim our own true selves, setting us free to become the child of God we were created and called to be.<sup>4</sup>

But we must listen and discern wisely, for the voice of Folly is all around us too. In the final verses of this chapter, Wisdom tells us three times to listen. Now does that sound like a parent, or what? I don't know about you, but in our house, if we have to tell our children to do something repeatedly, the third time we use stern voices, and it is the final warning. The next time includes consequences. In the same manner, God is strongly encouraging us to *listen* to the voice of Wisdom, for she is calling.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 30.

Imagine if you ran into Wisdom this week in everyday places. It might go something like this:

I was shopping at Hub City Coop and ran into Wisdom. She called me over and began talking. Then I went to the county courthouse, and there she was again, making a plea for justice. After that, I dropped by my children's school, and she had gotten there before me, calling for students and teachers alike to seek truth.

Then I went for a walk on the Cottonwood Trail, where 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, since the beginning. 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 come 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 trust the voice of wisdom inside of yourself? Will you?"<sup>5</sup>

Wisdom calls us, my friends. Wisdom beckons us. Are you listening for her voice in your life? Are you ready to follow her ways? Are you ready to be renewed? Now is the time. Right here and now in the busy-ness of life. Not when life calms down, because does it ever? Wisdom calls to us out of the chaos of everyday life and says, "It's time, my child. Listen. Learn. Live."

*All glory and honor be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.*

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<sup>5</sup> Jeff Paschal. *Feasting on the Word Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 2*. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 31.