

September 13, 2015

The book of Proverbs is a part of what is known as the “Wisdom Books” in the Old Testament and Proverbs is thought to be the oldest of these books. Like the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes the book of Proverbs had been thought to be written by Solomon, which would place this book in about the 10th century B.C. In truth this book is not a unified composition but rather contains writings that come from different time periods in the history of the people of Israel. It is now understood that the final compilation and editing of this book occurred around the 6th century B.C., and met the needs of both of these groups of people, those from the earlier time period and those from the latter. The reading today comes from the section of Proverbs that contains what are known as the “wisdom poems and instructions.” We find in the reading this morning one of three times when Wisdom is personified as a woman. Woman Wisdom is placed clearly in the public eye, in this reading, much like a prophet or a woman coming to the city gate for judgment. Her appeal to those who should be listening is plain and simple. In asking “How long?” she prepares those listening for the following reproaches and announcements of doom.

Proverbs 1: 20-33

²⁰ Lady Wisdom goes out in the street and shouts. At the town center she makes her speech.

²¹ In the middle of the traffic she takes her stand. At the busiest corner she calls out:

²² "Simpletons! How long will you wallow in ignorance? Cynics! How long will you feed your cynicism? Idiots! How long will you refuse to learn?"

²³ About face! I can revise your life. Look, I'm ready to pour out my spirit on you; I'm ready to tell you all I know.

²⁴ As it is, I've called, but you've turned a deaf ear; I've reached out to you, but you've ignored me.

²⁵ "Since you laugh at my counsel and make a joke of my advice,

²⁶ How can I take you seriously? I'll turn the tables and joke about your troubles!

²⁷ What if the roof falls in, and your whole life goes to pieces? What if catastrophe strikes and there's nothing to show for your life but rubble and ashes?

²⁸ You'll need me then. You'll call for me, but don't expect an answer. No matter how hard you look, you won't find me.

²⁹ "Because you hated Knowledge and had nothing to do with the Fear-of-God,

³⁰ Because you wouldn't take my advice and brushed aside all my offers to train you,

³¹ Well, you've made your bed - now lie in it; you wanted your own way - now, how do you like it?

³² Don't you see what happens, you simpletons, you idiots? Carelessness kills; complacency is murder.

³³ First pay attention to me, and then relax. Now you can take it easy - you're in good hands."

Throughout the first part of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' actions bring up questions about his identity. In today's reading Jesus poses the question himself, with the disciples recounting popular opinions around the identity of Jesus. Jesus then directly poses this question to the disciples and Peter is the first to answer. This interaction sets the stage for the unfolding of the proper understanding of Jesus as the Christ and the consequences of such understanding. For the readers of Mark, and for every subsequent generation, the challenge facing believers is how properly do we confess Jesus as the Messiah amid conflicting claims?

Mark 8: 27-38

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. As they walked, he asked, "Who do the people say I am?"

²⁸ "Some say 'John the Baptizer,'" they said. "Others say 'Elijah.' Still others say 'one of the prophets.'"

²⁹ He then asked, "And you - what are you saying about me? Who am I?" Peter gave the answer: "You are the Christ, the Messiah."

³⁰ Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone.

³¹ He then began explaining things to them: "It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive."

³² He said this simply and clearly so they couldn't miss it.

³³ Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. "Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works."

³⁴ Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how.

³⁵ Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self.

³⁶ What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?

³⁷ What could you ever trade your soul for?

³⁸ "If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I'm leading you when you get around your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you'll be an even greater embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, his Father, with an army of the holy angels."

Sermon – “Where, o where, o where can God be? – looking at wisdom and what does it mean to be wise”

Welcome back Sunday! It is hard to believe that we are beginning another year here at Windsor Park United. I was thinking about this the other day and I was amazed at how fast time is flying by. The kids have begun another year at school and I was looking on Facebook the other day and was shocked to see posts from parents about what grades their children were entering this year and I realized I am getting older.

I find it interesting that we consider this to be the beginning of a new year at church, when in fact we are coming to the end of the church year. The new church year will begin at the end of November this year as we enter Lent. Be that as it may, we come together many of us after having some time off from the church, whether that be for formal holidays, informal holidays, or in my case work.....

The readings these past two weeks have been interesting and in some ways challenging. We have had readings for the last two weeks from the book of Proverbs and I have been thinking about these for quite a while now and I have come to the conclusion that they might actually be just what we need at this time in our lives and at this time of the year. As I said earlier we are just now beginning a new year at church and I wonder if this is the time that we really need to challenge ourselves to change.

Today we heard a reading from Proverbs where Wisdom is seen as a woman calling to the people on the street corner. So I would like to begin this morning with a little bit of an interactive thing I have named “Finish the Proverb!”

Now some of these will be your traditional proverbs that I am sure a lot of you will be able to complete, but then we will move to some that I found that were called “proverbs for twenty somethings” and they are a bit more difficult.

The first set of proverbs I found in a commentary written on Proverbs chapter 1 by Rev. Scott E. Hoezee who is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church in North America and has served two congregations. He was the pastor of Second Christian Reformed Church in Fremont, Michigan, from 1990-1993. Then from 1993-2005 he was the Minister of Preaching and Administration at Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the spring of 2005 Scott accepted an offer to become the first Director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching.

So I will begin with the first part of the proverb and I invite you to finish it off;

“When the going gets tough.....the tough get going!”

“What goes up.....must come down!”

“A fool and his money.....are soon parted!”

“The grass is always greener.....on the other side of the fence!”

“With friends like that.....who needs enemies!”

“People who live in glass houses.....should not throw stones!”

Okay so how did people do with those ones? Pretty good I think. So now let’s try the proverbs for the twenty somethings;

“You can’t have your cake..... (and eat it too) and still pretend to be on a juice cleanse!”

“He who laughs last..... (laughs best) has the slowest internet connection!”

“The early bird..... (gets the worm) gets the least horrific morning commute!”

“If you can’t beat them..... (join them) talk smack about them on Facebook!”

“A penny saved..... (is a penny earned) is impossible!”

“Actions speak louder..... (than words) than passive-aggressive texts!”

So, how did we do on those ones? Not quite as good I imagine.

What does this have to do with our readings today? The reading from Wisdom has her calling out to the people on the street corner and the majority of the people are not hearing her. Is that because they are not listening? Is it because they are just too busy in the goings on in their own lives? What do we understand as wisdom today?

There was once a time when to understand the first set of proverbs probably spoke truth to people’s lives and they might have been considered a gauge of those who might be wise. I am not so sure that we understand wise people the same way in our modern world. What is wisdom and who do we see as being wise in today’s world? Whose voices do we hear?

It can be said that wisdom is the ability to get through the many and varied situations that confront us throughout the course of our lives. To understand that which can keep us whole in the midst of struggle, strife, those things that can pull

us apart and cause us to fail or be led astray. Those things that pulls away from God.

Wisdom is calling on the street corner, can we hear her?

I was reading a news article the other day on the unrefugee.org website about Angelina Jolie speaking to the United Nations Security Council around refugees. Now I understand that she is a special envoy to the United Nations and has done a lot of humanitarian work, but I began to think about how many times I have heard of actors or other famous people speaking in front of government committees and such because we see them as people "in the know." I wonder if sometimes we assume because someone can recite lines, written by others by the way, well that they must have something to say to all of us, they must be the wise ones of our age and yet I wonder if this is really true. Scott Hoezee asks this question in regards to Bill Gates. Now I would be the first one to say that Bill Gates is very successful at what he does, but as Hoezee points out just because Bill Gates the founder of Microsoft wrote a computer program that was wildly successful does this mean that Gates is one of the wise ones of the world and we should all run out and buy his book entitled *The Road Ahead*. It seems as Hoezee points out that we have assumed the Bill Gates has become some "font of information and advice worth listening to."

Wisdom is shouting on the street corner, can we hear her?

We have also recently begun to confuse the use of technology with wisdom. I will be the first one to admit that I struggle with spelling and grammar. There was a time, and this was after I graduated high school that I struggled to understand how to write a complete sentence. I remember in grade 12 English a good part of our mark that year was based on a large project which included a substantial essay. Well I struggled with the writing of that essay and when my mark was returned I understood exactly how much I struggled as I received a B on the project with the comment from my teacher stating that had I edited my paper for sentence structure and spelling I might have received an A. My children are now grammar perfectionists. It is actually humorous as Josh the oldest rants quite often about the lack of spelling and grammar on Facebook and in emails. He says that if he is going to send anything to anyone, via any form of communication it better have proper grammar and spelling. So guess who now edits my papers? But with this advent of technology where we have computers that will spell check for and alert us when a word may not be used in the proper context, many can appear to be wise while not really living up to that, so we have this sense false wisdom. The internet has also allowed many to have so much information at their

fingertips but does that mean that they are then able to process this information in a way that is coherent and allows us to live more full lives, lives that are more generous and giving?

Another issue that is related is that we begin to dismiss those who do not use technology.

And I think that young people are particularly good at this, especially in regards to older people in their lives, they don't see people as being wise if they don't use technology, as if technology is the gold standard for wisdom in modern society. Wisdom is yelling on the street corner, can we hear her?

As Wisdom called out on the street corner no one heard her, and that is also one of the problems we have today. We seem to be so busy that it is sometimes easier for us to just not really listen for true wisdom, sometimes it is just easier to listen to all of those others in society. Sometimes it is just easier to allow our attention to be taken up by all those things in life that distract us. Augustine way back in the 4th century also talked about this struggle;

“Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.” – Augustine

And so what “created” things keep us from hearing true wisdom? And where do we find true Wisdom? Our lives become so busy that we don't seem to have the time to hear anything.

Wisdom is screaming on the street corner, can you hear her?

And yet real wisdom is all around us if we just stop for a moment and truly listen. Sometimes a child can be wise beyond their years because they see through all those things that cloud our judgement. Sometimes we ignore the voices of those with years of experience because we dismiss them as being old-fashioned. Sometimes real wisdom is found in the voices of those who have been marginalized, but because they speak with a voice that is so foreign to ours we ignore them.

I believe that this is where our Gospel reading comes in this morning. In the Gospel Jesus is asking questions about who he is and when Peter challenges Jesus' revelation that he must proceed along the path that he is travelling Jesus rebukes Peter. In the end Jesus is saying anyone who truly wants to live has to follow Jesus. And I wonder if we do too?

As Christians we are tasked with always moving towards God, living a life in God's wisdom. One way to do this is to use Jesus as our example and guide, we are called to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus was one of those marginalized ones in his own society, one of those that we might not hear in today's world.

In looking at the place where I find everything true all the time I found an article written by Erica Williams Simon who is a former political strategist living in Los Angeles. Williams Simon compared the Kim Davies events from this week to the Pope's call to help Syrian Refugees and she speaks of the do's of faith.

The do's are actions and principles like these:

Do love your neighbor. Do feed the hungry. Do heal the sick. Do seek justice. Do practice humility. Do give more than you receive. Do take in thousands of refugee families.

Faith used in this way can:

Remind us of the simple truths hiding beneath complex issues.

Empower us to take concrete action in response to pain and injustice.

Connect and draw people together across all divides.

Wow, don't these all seem like things we heard Jesus doing? These do's help to turn us back towards God.

Wisdom is whispering on the street corner, can we hear her?

At the beginning I said that this was a good time to do something different. I believe that God's wisdom is whispering, calling, shouting, yelling and screaming at us, but it is up to us to open ourselves to hearing her. In looking towards Jesus it might help us to do just that, to open ourselves up to hearing God's wisdom in our world. So I challenge you at the beginning of this church year to really take a moment in our daily lives, to stop, to really listen to hear God's wisdom in what we should do in this world. We are in the process of making some big decisions and we need guidance, if we profess to be Christians then that means that we are Christians in all that we do, every day of our lives, not just here on Sunday mornings. So I challenge to you to really be open to hearing God's speak to you, from the street corner, from the parking lots, from within your own heart.

Let us truly listen for God's wisdom, let us have the courage to follow Jesus, to listen to that wisdom, and maybe we can change the world. Amen