

“Wisdom at the Crossroads”

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 and Romans 5:1-5

Trinity Sunday

Message for June 12, 2022

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Among the many joys I experience here at Tippe is gathering with our zoom worship groups on Monday evenings and Wednesday mornings, because we explore the Bible Wisdom teachings together. It gives me an opportunity to hear the shared wisdom of the group, to go deeper with the text, and continue to learn how these passages speak to each of us in our daily lives.

As we think about wisdom, it is helpful to keep in mind that there is a difference between wisdom and knowing or knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, wisdom often exists beneath our consciousness. Knowledge, gained through the studying of new information, consists of a rich storage of information. Wisdom, on the other hand, has to do more with insight, understanding and accepting of the fundamental 'nature' of things in life, based on experience and intuition.

Through the Wisdom Book of Proverbs, this morning we heard that Wisdom comes before – at the outset – even before creation, and yet, a member of our worship group noted that wisdom is the best we have to offer – it's not a *thing*, it is literally the cloth we are made of and it's what makes up matter and everything that surrounds us. So, maybe it was here before creation, but it also makes up every element of our existence and all that is around us. It is a thread, woven into everything and everyone.

What was spoken aloud multiple times to me throughout this week, (which makes me think it was a message for me, and potentially for you) is that we learn more through failure than through success, that when we go through a difficult or painful time, we gain something from the struggle.

Paul the Apostle speaks to this in his letter to the Christian church in Rome: *suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.* (Romans 5: 3-5)

This passage brings to mind for me what we heard from Richard Rohr as we gathered this morning, when he described our relationship with God as “flow” and that we are a “Fourth Person” of the Eternal Flow of God. Through this flow, we receive support and comfort, we are shaped by experiences that build endurance and through which we find hope.

As we think about God’s grace, as we reflect on what has unfolded in our lives in the wake of struggle, we may have gained the perspective that allows us to see what we have gained. Likely, we may know the truth of the “silver lining,” but usually we don’t want someone to point that out to us when we are in the thick of it! When we are hurting or striving or putting one foot in front of the other we don’t want to hear how great it will be on the other side. We need to focus on the present and what is in front of us in order to move through it. Sometimes it takes years and sometimes we may never recognize how we’ve grown or what we’ve learned or how we’ve been shaped by an experience.

This often can be perceived as being at a crossroads – a point of transition, a moment of discernment, a call for reflection that points you in a particular direction. We are at the intersection of experience and the unknown, memories of failures and of success, moments of joy and of pain – this all comes together to inform how we move through the world.

When the dust has settled a bit, when we are moving through a time that gives us space for reflection, we might be better able to see the patterns of our lives and gain some perspective. As I listened to members of our community reflect on what their lives look like now, on this side of the pandemic, or in the wake of a relationship ending or a loved one dying or recovery from an illness, or loss of a job, is that they learned something about themselves, about the world, about their faith, about other people – and they caught glimpses of the Divine woven into those experiences and places and people. They notice things they are able to do now that they didn’t know they were capable of. Often, they feel better equipped to deal with the tough stuff that might unfold down the road. (Of course, many of us also name that we’re sick of the tough stuff and ready for a break!!!) ;)

I think that especially in our culture of individualism and progress and “self-help,” we forget that we can and need to turn to one another, to our communities, and enter the flow of relationship as God’s love is poured out over all.

The passage we heard from Proverbs personifies Wisdom, depicted as the Holy Spirit, an aspect of the Trinity. This description of her identity, purpose, and continuing presence in our lives, provides us an anchor as we reflect on what we have been through and imagine what life may yet call from us. Through the lens of this text, Wisdom becomes more than simply the nondescript sustainer, she becomes the Advocate highlighted by John's Gospel. Wisdom is the Holy Spirit personified. Reclaiming this aspect of the Holy Spirit can be an illuminating and liberating exercise. We need Wisdom's presence and voice. We need to hear her beauty, acknowledge her integrity, appreciate her fresh perspective.

Wisdom takes her stand and proclaims, "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live." Wisdom is the speaker who not only explains who God is but reminds us of whom we seek to be. Wisdom speaks to everyone, and every one of us has a piece of Wisdom in our souls if we just pay close enough attention.

As Wisdom speaks to all of us and as we witness to the ways Wisdom works alongside God as a companion, we too can contemplate our own relationship with God. What companionship do we have with God? In what ways do we support God? How do we back up God? How do we witness God's creative work? More than that, how do we participate in the creative process? What do we create? What relationships do we help to mold? What choices do we make? What part of the Wisdom of God are we willing to claim for ourselves?

These are big questions, so it can be helpful to back up a bit and just think simply about the things you have done or have made or created that have felt like they came from a deep place within you – often you know because it sparked joy in you or was effortless, or maybe instead, it took a great deal of focus and persistence. Maybe it was a meal, a garden, a vocation, a perspective, a child, a sense of recovery, a vital project in your community. These things were created with your own wisdom, and with an aspect of Wisdom that is part and parcel with God. Do you see yourself alongside God in the creative process?

Let us carry these questions with us going forward as we turn our attention to the overflowing love and grace poured out among us. May we each attend to the wisdom within and name the wisdom we witness within one another. Amen.