



“When Wisdom Calls Our Name”

Proverbs 8:1-4, Romans 5:1-5, John 16:12-15

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Trinity Sunday

Out of all the sermons I have prepared to preach at Plymouth, this is the first time that the title came weeks before the sermon was written. I don’t know what that signifies, but I feel there has to be some meaning behind it. Now don’t try to help me figure out the meaning while I’m delivering the message. Spend your time remembering when wisdom has called your name or our name, and if something comes to mind in the interim as to why the title came before I wrote the sermon, please don’t hesitate to share it with me later.

Let us pray: God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change; courage to change the things we can; and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

In our Old Testament lesson of Proverbs 8:1-4, wisdom speaks. It asks, “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 who live.”

But who is wisdom? Who is the wisdom that cries out to the people; that calls your name; our name? And what is this wisdom saying?

The Greek word for wisdom is “Sophia.” Sophia was one of the most powerful figures in Judaism and early Christianity. She represented divine insight and embodied teachings that were gathered from the traditions and experiences of elders who were determined to preserve it, by passing it on from one generation to the next. But Sophia, also known as Lady Wisdom, transcends space and time; for verses 22 thru 31 of our Old Testament lesson state that wisdom has always been around. It existed before the foundations of the earth in order to create the earth as well as the heavens. Wisdom is described as a master worker. A master worker is someone whose creative work shows sensitivity and imagination. The creative work is an original from which everything else is made. It serves as a model or ideal. So when wisdom speaks it is calling us to copy what has already been designed and tested for durability.

Bruce Lloyd, Professor of Strategic Management at London South Bank University, in his article, *Wisdom & Leadership: Linking the Past, Present & Future*, considers wisdom “to be a useful 'truth' with a long shelf life ('it has stood the test of time'), and it is particularly related to insights that are useful in understanding the relationships that work well within ourselves, and in relationships with each other and with the universe as a whole (...the insights are globally recognizable).”

Maybe you’ve heard these insights: the Chinese Proverb, “A little impatience will spoil great plans”; Mahatma Gandhi’s “You must be the change you want to see in the world”;

Aesop's "United we stand, divided we fall." What about these wisdom sayings from the book of Proverbs? "Be wise enough not to wear yourself out trying to get rich. Your money can be gone in a flash, as if it had grown wings and flown away like an eagle." (23:4-5, GNT) "Do not remove the ancient landmark that your ancestors set up." (22:28, NRSV)

Last week after church, my cousin Fran and I drove into the city to have dinner at a restaurant called the *Cafeteria* in Chelsea and then headed to Battery Park City to walk off the delicious food we had just eaten. As we talked and strolled along the promenade of Battery Park, we decided to walk into the World Financial Center's Winter Garden. To our surprise and delight we found ourselves standing in the midst of a photo and video exhibition by Andrew Zuckerman, called, *Wisdom*, produced in collaboration with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, featuring the portraits and voices of famous people imparting their words of wisdom on love, work, conflict resolution, and the environment. The project, also featured in book form, was "inspired by the idea that one of the greatest gifts one generation can pass on to another is the wisdom it has gained from experience." We heard musician Bill Withers say, "You can't get to wonderful without passing through all right. You can't skip from not being able to function to running the whole show"; and anthropologist Jane Goodall, "It's awfully sad that with our clever brains taking us to the moon, we seem to have lost wisdom, and that's the wisdom of the indigenous people who would make a major decision based on, how will this decision affect our people seven generations ahead?" There were wisdom statements from Chinua Achebe, author of "When Things Fall Apart"; actor Robert Redford; comedian Billy Connolly; political scientist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Henry Kissinger; and anti-apartheid activist and politician Helen Suzman. Their sharing is intended to make the world a better place in the future, checked against our own experiences.

But then we need to reflect on our experiences whether they are good, bad, or indifferent, and look at how our decisions impact our lives and the world around us. We also need to look at how the choices of others impact their lives, our lives, and the world around them.

In our Epistle lesson, Romans 5:1-5, the Apostle Paul describes God's saving action in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Paul's words of hope express that no matter what we go through; no matter what we face, we are justified by faith and therefore, have a peace with God and access to a grace in which we stand. Paul also says that because God's love has been poured into our hearts, our suffering produces endurance, and our endurance produces character, and as our character is developed and strengthened, we then have what it takes to continue to hope. That is worth boasting about; that is wisdom worth sharing.

There is nothing that we need to do to make the process of moving from suffering to endurance to character building to hope, happen. It is a mysterious process that cannot be intellectualized or forced. It is a process that happens by faith because of the power of the Holy Spirit that is beyond space, time and our understanding. The Holy Spirit is the bearer of truth. We know too well that the truth sometimes hurts. Sometimes we just have trouble bearing it.

Jesus knew too well that his disciples would not understand his impending persecution and death. He tried to tell them in more ways than one, but they just didn't get it. So Jesus conveys to his disciples in our Gospel lesson of John 16:12-15,

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth [wisdom] comes, the Spirit [wisdom] will guide you into all truth, for Spirit [wisdom] will not speak on the Spirit's [wisdom's] own, but will speak whatever Spirit [wisdom] hears, and Spirit [wisdom] will declare to you the things that will come. Spirit [wisdom] will glorify me, because Spirit [wisdom] will take what is mine and declare it to you. All

that God has is mine. For this reason I said that Spirit [wisdom] will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Jesus is saying in our lesson that the Spirit of truth is like a guardian who takes you by the hand and guides you. It helps you make sense out of what is happening to you, your community, your church, and your world. It is God giving you what you need to turn things around and make them different. But Jesus is also declaring that the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of truth will make known to us who Jesus is, why Jesus was here, and what Jesus' death and resurrection symbolize to those of us who also need areas of our lives resurrected.

The Spirit of truth is the Wisdom of God which is also the Logos ("Word") of God. It is a teacher and witness to something that actually works for the good of us all. Wisdom's position is to keep us grounded individually and collectively in community.

Nothing you could wish for holds a candle to wisdom. Its sole purpose is to set us free; to save us from heading down the wrong path; from making another bad choice. Wisdom, or the Spirit of truth, always comes to break the destructive cycles in our lives; to stop us from sabotaging the goodness and mercy God wants following us all the days of our lives.

David Starr Jordan once said, "Wisdom is knowing what to do next, skill is knowing how to do it, and virtue is doing it." Norman Cousins wrote, "Wisdom consists of the anticipation of consequences." But sometimes we miss the mark. Here's an example from an unknown author:

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house-building business to live a more leisurely life with his wife and enjoy his extended family. He would miss the paycheck each week, but he wanted to retire. They could get by.

The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes, but over time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end a dedicated career.

When the carpenter finished his work, his employer came to inspect the house. Then he handed the front-door key to the carpenter and said, "This is your house... my gift to you."

The carpenter was shocked!

What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently.

So it is with us. We build our lives, a day at a time, often putting less than our best into the building. Then, with a shock, we realize we have to live in the house we have built. If we could do it over, we would do it much differently.

But, you cannot go back. You are the carpenter, and every day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Someone once said, "Life is a do-it-yourself project." Your attitudes and the choices you make today help build the "house" you will live in tomorrow. Therefore, build wisely!

What is wisdom saying to you? What is wisdom saying to our church? Wisdom is saying let me be established fully in you and in the church; let me be exercised through you and the church, so that generations ahead share in the experience of that wisdom, of the Word of God. Let the generations ahead hear that Jesus' story is both a past event and a contemporary story. Whatever we have learned from our past becomes wisdom for our

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contemporary times. Share your wisdom with your children. Share the wisdom sayings in Proverbs. Share the wisdom sayings that fill the pages of the Bible. Share the wisdom sayings of Jesus. What we do today impacts our tomorrows and the generations ahead.

When wisdom calls your name; our name, can you hear it? Can you hear what it is saying and why? Listen.

Amen.

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