

Sunday, June 7, 2007

Proverbs 8:1-4,22-31

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.

Invitation:

This morning as we prepare to celebrate communion, I want to repeat the question asked in our scripture lesson: Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

In the church calendar this is Trinity Sunday. In question six of the catechism I studied years ago for my confirmation, we were taught that there was only one God, yet in three persons – and then the pastor said: It's like water, it can be ice, it can be liquid, it can be steam. I don't know if that's theologically acceptable, but it gave our young minds a way to think about this mystery that certainly was better than latching on to the then ubiquitous symbol of Ballantine Ale with the logo that look a lot like the symbol of the Trinity that hung in church and the voice of Mel Allen reminding us of the three rings of purity, body, and flavor.

But we never considered how woven in and out of the Trinity is the figure of Wisdom. Wisdom - God's daily delight when the heavens and the earth were formed; wisdom - the word that is made flesh in Jesus Christ; wisdom - the spirit which God sends upon the disciples to form them as a community and enable them to recall, understand, and live according to the teaching and example of the Lord.

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

A few weeks ago there was an article in the Sunday paper about the modern scientific study of wisdom. It traced this back to the 1950s when Vivian Clayton became fascinated by special qualities of her father and her maternal grandmother. There was something that distinguished them from everyone else she knew. Despite limited

education, they possessed an uncanny ability to remain calm in the midst of crises, made good decisions and conveyed an almost palpable sense of emotional contentment.

Over the years, as different scholars followed in the footsteps of Dr. Clayton, they agreed on certain qualities associated with wisdom: a clear-eyed view of human nature and the human predicament; emotional resiliency and the ability to cope in the face of adversity; an openness to other possibilities; forgiveness; humility; and a knack for learning from lifetime experiences.

And yet there is a yin-yang to wisdom that makes it difficult to pin down. Wisdom is founded upon knowledge, but wisdom is shaped by uncertainty. Action is important, but so is judicious inaction. Emotion is central to wisdom, yet detachment is essential.

The article then goes on to talk about research into the connection between age and wisdom – the older but wiser hypothesis. Certainly, some people get wiser as they get older, but there is no guarantee.

So where does wisdom come from, and how does one acquire it? Surprisingly, the author writes, a good deal of evidence, both anecdotal and empirical, suggests that the seeds of wisdom are planted early in life — certainly earlier than old age, often earlier than middle age and possibly even earlier than young adulthood. And there are strong hints that wisdom is associated with an early exposure to adversity or failure, something we all try to shield our children from experiencing.

So science has discovered the insight that William Blake expressed almost two hundred years ago in his Songs of Experience:

What is the price of Experience Do we buy it for a song?

Or wisdom for a dance in the Streets No, it is bought with the price of all that a human hath.

Christianity is about transformation. There is the transformation of Jesus of Nazareth into Jesus Christ. There are miracles of transformation in healings, in feeding five thousand, in turning water into wine. There is the great transformation of the curse of the cross into the blessing of the resurrection, and of the scattered fearful disciples into a bold community of faith.

Jesus once said: “To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

Everyone who lives faces a measure of adversity, loss, and suffering. But in communion with Christ, with the yeast of the Gospel kneaded in, our adversity can be transformed into wisdom.

In a moment we will take an ordinary ritual and pray that it be transformed for us into a sacrament, a moment of connection between our lives and the grace of God, a moment of connection that shapes us as a bold Christian community.

In this sacrament we remember the teaching and example of our Lord, we declare ourselves his disciples, and we chose hope over despair because we have faith that God can bring life out of death, wisdom out of adversity, joy out of sorrow.

Yes, Wisdom calls and understanding raises her voice – to you she says “Come, for now all things are ready.”

We celebrate an open communion. This sacrament is for all who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's people. Christ welcomes you. Christ recognizes you. Christ invites you into the circle of fellowship in his name.

There is a certain wisdom to life and a wisdom to death and a wisdom to salvation and redemption. This supper we are about to celebrate is a feast of wisdom,