

Sermon Text – Sunday, June 15, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: John 16:12-15; 2nd Reading: Romans 5:1-5
Scripture for Message: Proverbs 8:1-31 “Wisdom”

The personification of wisdom creates a metaphor for a call to learn and accept counsel and guidance. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or action is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. A metaphor is an implied comparison, as in "the silk of the singer's voice." This contrasts with the explicit comparison of the simile, which uses like or as, as in "a voice smooth like silk."

When we use metaphor, we make a leap beyond rational, ho-hum comparison to an identification or fusion of two objects, resulting in a new entity that has characteristics of both: the voice isn't like silk; it is silk. Many critics regard the making of metaphors as a system of thought antedating or bypassing logic. Metaphor is the fundamental language of poetry, although it is common on all levels and in all kinds of language.

I mention metaphors because the book of Proverbs is rich with metaphor. The personification of “woman wisdom” is not meant to imply any actual gendering within the triune God. We must look at the use of gender merely to figure speech – just as Israel is presented in the feminine gender by many of the prophets of the Old Testament and the church is presented as a bride in the New Testament. There is no claim here that woman wisdom is any part of the presence of Jesus or the Holy Spirit other than a claim that God, in three persons, created with wisdom, Jesus teaches with wisdom, and with wisdom the Holy Spirit guides and gives counsel.

Keeping all that in mind, maybe these words can lend something to our understanding of God. These words tell us that “wisdom” speaks to all humankind. She speaks in a loud voice “near the place where public decisions were made and speakers were heard.”¹ Given this information it is apparent to me that you would have to try very hard to ignore her. She states, “To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.” The message here is for all of us and the call is for us to listen. Listen to her instruction and guidance because what she offers is trustworthy and just. Her instruction is better than choice gold and more precious than rubies.

Wisdom is concerned with success in righteousness, with justice, and with truth. Wisdom speaks with honesty and integrity; she tells us that truth is worth something far more valuable than anything else. Wisdom emphasizes her own righteousness in speech and action and instructs us accordingly, “righteous speech is ethical, it speaks the truth out of concern for another and rejects self-serving

¹ Paul E. Koptak. *Proverbs: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan. 2003. Print. 227.

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distortions.”² Her words contribute to our understanding of creation and to our understanding of the Word, who was with God in the beginning.

Unlike Job, who was unable to answer when God questioned, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” (Job 38:4). Wisdom was present “when he marked out the foundations of the earth” and therefore has a legitimate claim to speak with knowledge and authority. Wisdom was present with God at creation. In our reading from Proverbs, verses thirty & thirty-one tell us that wisdom was “constantly at his side” and filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence.

There are two different pictures we can get from this metaphor – one is the image of wisdom as a child taking delight in what her father is doing. Imagine a toddler clapping and laughing with delight at the magic of creation, finding joy as she playfully witnesses the creation of the entire world and the creation of humankind itself. Another image is of wisdom present with YHWH as an artisan or an expert worker rejoicing with YHWH and delighting in everything that is created. “Because she delights in the way the world was ordered, she offers counsel concerning that order to the humans she also finds delightful.”

Both pictures tell us that there is delight, joy, and playfulness in creation and in humanity. In addition, they inform us that God has never been without wisdom. “The Lord brought [wisdom] forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old.” This is a reminder of eternal presence. God created wisdom and created with wisdom. These are the credentials of wisdom, our reading of this chapter from Proverbs ends with these words, “Now then, my children, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it.”

So, what instruction does wisdom give us today? How can the church learn from her instruction? First, I wonder if the church can learn to delight in God’s creation, just as wisdom rejoiced in his inhabited world and delighted in humanity. The church can delight in all aspects of creation and created things just as the church can delight in all aspects of humanity. I wonder if wisdom asks us to welcome the wonder of creation with eyes wide open, delighting in its richness, no matter what happens. I wonder if wisdom invites us to approach our worship with the same wonder and delight, with playfulness to explore all the varied aspects of worshiping our Lord. I believe that these words from “woman wisdom” remind us that no fullness of life is possible for the isolated individual who surveys life from a place of cool detachment.

Wisdom invites participation with creation and with all of humanity. Wisdom teaches us how to live and how to love God. Wisdom offers an example

² Paul E. Koptak. *Proverbs: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan. 2003. Print. 238.

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of worship, in fact wisdom leads our worship of a triune God. She leads us with playfulness and with delight. Wisdom teaches us how to offer praise to a triune God. Wisdom also sets for us an example of social responsibility.

As wisdom describes what she witnessed in creation, she describes the boundaries and limits that God set while establishing the foundations of the earth – boundaries that give order and security for creation. It should be noted that within the book of Proverbs, wisdom speaks to all humankind but has a particular message for kings and rulers. Part of that message is regarding limits and boundaries which, whether physical or social, are foundations of rule and authority. Wisdom portrays herself as a counselor to kings and a principle of social order. Look at verse 14 through 16 – “Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power. By me kings reign and rulers issue decrees that are just; by me princes govern, and nobles – all who rule on earth.”

This is a reminder that those who rule with wisdom find honor and prosperity. We are told that those who find wisdom find life and receive favor from the Lord, so we are reminded to listen to wisdom’s instruction. What does this mean for a church who seeks the guidance of wisdom? Here are a few suggestions: Because of wisdom’s love of faithful speech, Christians should strive to practice it. Because of wisdom’s concern for righteous rule, Christians should also be concerned with freedom to worship and witness as well as righteousness, justice, and fair dealing in their communities and their nation.

A church that withdraws from public life only to concern itself with evangelism and filling the pews might fail to adequately care for the poor or call out for just treatment of immigrants and minorities. Similarly, a church that engages society but only on its own terms demonstrates a lack of integrity, concern for goodwill, and good sense in its message. A lesson in this for the church is to listen to the words of wisdom, incorporate them in all that the church does knowing that wisdom is from God, and with God in all things.

Underlying all what wisdom tells us in this scripture reading are instructions regarding power and authority. “Christians should make themselves aware of the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of power that arise in our interactions.”³ The church must realize that whatever power we have, members and leaders alike, must be used to build others up instead of trampling them down – seeking neither titles nor honors, only the joy of helping. “Wisdom herself offers her counsel and teaching as a form of power, but she is careful to point to the responsibilities of that power, responsibilities that are learned by placing a higher value on righteousness and setting the gifts of wealth and power in their proper places”(IBID).

³ Paul E. Koptak. *Proverbs: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan. 2003. Print. 241

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Wisdom teaches us many things, in the metaphors of Proverbs we learn that God created with wisdom, and we learn that wisdom's instructions are more valuable than any riches the world would allow us to accumulate. I wonder if what we can learn about God from all of this is that the creation of wisdom is the greatest gift God can give us. With wisdom Jesus teaches us how to live according to God's will, with wisdom we are counseled and given the Spirit's guidance. All things wise and wonderful come to us from the creations of our triune God.