

Sermon on Proverbs 81,22-31 and John1.1-14

Have you ever stopped and wondered at the synchronicity of life here on planet earth.

Yesterday walking up to church, I stopped to admire the sheer beauty and simplicity of a crop of snowdrops that had pushed through the soil in the graveyard.

Tender and fragile they were being blown about the wind. Undaunted, they stood their ground.

I marvelled and wondered that they seemed to have the knowledge built into their DNA that January, in the cold frozen Northern hemisphere was their time to push through the frozen soil. A hope filled first sign that the earth was waking again.

A first sign to brighten my day.

And likewise in the Autumn I can be stopped in my tracks when I hear a flock of geese honking as they fly over my head, causing me to look up and gaze in wonder at the perfect V formation they have made. Working together as a community, each looking out for other geese as they take turns to lead the formation across the air miles.

There is a hidden built in wisdom at play everywhere you turn.

Creation seems to have been hardwired to do what it was created to do at exactly the right time.

Though you could argue that human beings do their very best at times to try to thwart the master plan.

This morning the reading from Proverbs may have come as a surprise to some of you.

What... there's a third Creation story in the Hebrew scriptures?

When was that slipped in? How did I miss that?

Hang on a minute how did God suddenly become feminine? Surely this must be some Liberal rewrite?

You did hear it right... In Hebrew the word for Wisdom is feminine ...

In Greek the word is known as Sophia.

Wisdom is personified as female, and in her humanity finds all knowledge, insight, and truth.

She was there in the beginning working alongside God and delighting in the human race.

These echoes of Genesis 1 establish Wisdom as the ordering principle of creation, by which God proscribes the boundaries of created things embedding Wisdom into the very creation.

Wisdom in turn draws human beings into delighted relationship with the divine.

I believe that deep wisdom resides within each and every one of us.

But we need to practice listening to the Wise Woman in all of us.

To find time to stop and listen...and simply let her speak. . . . her voice is quiet. . . . is tender and truthful.

She is not afraid of anything or anyone.

She will not give you all the answers, but she does know what you need to do in this moment—to wonder, grieve, fight, rage, listen, reimagine, breathe.

The loudest voices in the world right now are ones running on the energy of fear, criticism, and cruelty.

The voices we spend the most time listening to, in the world and inside our own minds, shape the way we see, how we feel, and what we do.

But when we spend time listening to people who are speaking from their deepest wisdom though, we can feel understanding, inspiration, and energy nourish the very root of our own innate wisdom.

The Wisdom of God continues to seem foolish to the world.
But yet this Wisdom calls to us all... everyday.

In the gospels we encounter Jesus - a remarkable rabbi and amazing wisdom teacher.

Jesus lived in opposition to the wisdom of the day, which taught that ritual purity and strict observance of the law would lead to righteousness.

Jesus taught an alternative, subversive wisdom, comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to

- a mustard seed (something tiny, and a weed no less!)
- a woman putting leaven into flour (note both women and leaven were impure according to Jewish law)

Moreover, he preached that the kingdom is for children – who were viewed as unimportant – in other words, the kingdom of heaven is for nobodies.

But Jesus went beyond *teaching* Wisdom, he embodied the Wisdom of God, living out an extravagant, inclusive love – healing the blind, raising the dead, eating with outcasts and sinners, touching lepers, Canaanites, women, and Gentiles.

Anyone familiar with Lady Wisdom in Judaism, will recognise her in the prologue of John.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without him not one thing came into being.'

This was the same language that was used centuries earlier for Wisdom. Jesus was both Incarnate Word and Incarnate Wisdom, Sophia and Logos are one and the same – Jesus the Christ.

Jesus' final words to his disciples in Matthew's gospel were *'Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'*

Jesus, the Christ, was in the beginning, is here in our now and will continue to be with us throughout our future.

St Bonaventure noted however that, "Wisdom is confusing to the proud and often evident to the lowly."

It seems that one of the most difficult lessons for us to learn is that knowledge is not the same as wisdom.

Becoming "full" of all the information in the world does not of itself accumulate into wisdom.

Wisdom is not the gathering of more facts and information, as if that would eventually coalesce into truth.

Rather Wisdom is a different way of seeing and knowing.

We need to practice attentiveness to the innate wisdom in which we live and move and have our being. Practice an ongoing receptivity to the wonder of life and have an ability to flow with what life offers. Even living life through a pandemic.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes in "An Altar in the World" of an excellent form of practice she calls attentive inaction: *"The easiest practice of reverence I know," she writes, "is simply to sit down somewhere outside and pay attention for at least twenty minutes."*

"It is not necessary to take on the whole world at first. Just take the three square feet of earth on which you are sitting, paying close attention to everything that lives within that small estate."

Thomas Merton also writes words of wisdom , "Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent.'

I wonder what wisdom might be gained in sitting still for twenty minutes and paying attention to our surroundings?

Why not give it a go... why not stop... and just gaze... at snowdrops or whatever catches your eye?

Day by day, O dear Lord, three things we pray.

To see thee more clearly.

To love thee more dearly.

And to follow thee more nearly...day by day by day by day by day.

Amen.