

Worship at home
July 17, 2022



God calls us to worship:

Responsive reading: Psalm 52

Hymn: #640 “Softly and tenderly”

We offer our prayers:

Prayer of Praise and Supplication (*please remain standing*):

God of majesty and mystery,
your love and purpose embrace the whole world.
You set us in a world of beauty and bounty
and invite us to meet you in the midst of its wonders.
You call us to love each other in the example of Jesus
to make your world a place of justice and compassion.
In this hour of worship, send us your Spirit of wisdom and grace
so that we can live out the praise on our lips
in our day to day living,
which we offer to you, our one and only God.

Please be seated.

*If we say that we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves,*

and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

*Yet we know that nothing is able to separate us
from the love of God in Jesus Christ.*

*Let us, therefore, be free to confess our sins
before the God who is faithful and just. (1 John 1:9)*

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

God of mercy;

**As we gather to celebrate your gift of love
we recall the times when we forget you
and are divided one from the other.**

**How often our thoughts, our words, and our actions
have betrayed the goodness you have shown to us.**

Forgive us.

Mend what is broken.

Heal the wounded relationships

that separate us from you,

from one another,

and which leave us divided within ourselves;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God offers the assurance of grace: John 3:16

We offer our lives and resources:

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)

God speaks to us:

Hymn:

#493 "How blessed are the ones who hear"

Wisdom's Call

The fourth step in our journey of engaging Godly wisdom in our daily walks of Christian discipleship is to heed Wisdom's call in the midst of the busiest times.

You'll recall that the book of Proverbs is set up as a conversation between a father and his son in which the father passes on advice for living in awe of and obedience to God in all quotidian realities.

This advice is given in the form of proverbs: 2–3-line sayings that use contrasts, comparisons, metaphors, analogies, and similes to teach some truth. Most of these proverbs are contained in chapters 10 - 22.

Chapters 1 – 9 form the introduction in which the father encourages his son to make the pursuit of this sacred wisdom his life's goal.

One of the interesting teaching tools that is used is the personification of wisdom. In other words, wisdom, which we might consider to be more of a concept or a quality, is presented in Proverbs as a living and relatable person. Wisdom is someone who wants to have a relationship with us and with whom it is in our best interest to pursue that relationship. And, she's a woman.

READ PROVERBS 8:1-21
PROVERBS 1:20-33.

1. There is a difference in purpose between the wisdom presented in the Bible and the wisdom of society.

Proverbs 8 describes Wisdom as being the person with whom can be found all good things. Wisdom speaks only noble things; all the words of her mouth are righteous; her advice is more valuable than the finest silver, gold, and jewels; hers is the advice that will allow kings to rule justly and nobles to govern rightly. It is a good thing to know Lady Wisdom!

That's not particularly different from secular wisdom. However, the difference is in purpose.

Scripture affirms that pursuing Wisdom is a means to an end; the end being belief, trust, awe, and communion with the Living and Triune God. Or, as the psalmists so often phrase it: refuge in God.

The difficulty is that wisdom is more of a concept than a tangible thing, and God is invisible. It can be hard, therefore, for us to embrace wisdom as anything more than an intellectual activity.

So, the wisdom that leads us to finding refuge in God, is given flesh and bones. It's personified.

Personifying wisdom allows us to engage our imaginations to help us connect in our mind's eye with the Lord we cannot see.

Now, why might wisdom be presented as a woman?

The short answer is: I don't know.

All of my commentaries are silent on this matter.

However, I'm not content leaving that question unaddressed and so, I want to offer three possible options.

Option 1:

In the Hebrew language, nouns are either masculine or feminine. The Hebrew word for "wisdom", *hok'mah*, is feminine. Therefore, wisdom is presented in the feminine form.

This is the simplest option, but I think it's too simple. The personification in Proverbs is too complete to be a simple matter of grammar. Wisdom is not only referred to with the feminine pronouns, she's given personality, speech, emotions and desires.

Although grammar does have a role to play, I think we can go deeper.

Option 2:

Remember that Proverbs is presented as a conversation between a father and his son in which the father encourages the son to make the pursuit of Godly wisdom his life's goal.

So, the father appeals to his son's imagination by presenting wisdom as this human-like character with whom he can build a relationship. And, he appeals to his son's desires by presenting wisdom as a woman. Someone with whom the son would want to court, marry, and build a life.

As we'll see next week, he also presents foolishness as a woman, but in this case it's a woman who would not make a good match for a holy, God-fearing young man.

Possible. If we were discussing a piece of secular literature, I might be more inclined to pursue this reasoning on its own merit.

However, what we are discussing in Proverbs, is the pursuit of *God's* wisdom. It's not just pursuing wisdom for wisdom's sake, nor for the sake of being a good citizen. The pursuit of Godly wisdom is ultimately the pursuit of God and of living faithfully as God's witnesses. The task is theological. The sex-appeal, like the grammar rationale, is an important part of the tradition, but it's not enough to fully explain the feminine personification of wisdom.

Option 3:

In the second half of Proverbs 8, which we read a few weeks ago, the poem describes Wisdom being present with the Lord at creation. Much as John 1 describes the Word, which we know to be Jesus, as being present with the Father before the hills in order stood, or earth received its frame.

We know from Genesis 1 that the divine Breath/Spirit – *ruah* was also present at creation.

Like *hok'mah*, *ruah* is feminine.

Logos (“Word” in reference to Jesus), *Yahweh*, and *Elohim* (the words for Lord and God) are all masculine.

With wisdom and spirit and God all being present at creation, we see both masculine and feminine present at creation. Such complementarity is woven throughout God's design of life and beauty. It's reflected in the creation of Adam and Eve when the Lord God (masculine) formed them out of the dust (feminine) and breathed (feminine) into them to bring life.

So, Wisdom is presented in a feminine form just as the Spirit is often understood in the feminine form because of this divine complementarity of the masculine and feminine working together to produce life, beauty, and holiness.

And she's presented as a street preacher, standing in the busiest parts of town pleading for anyone who'll listen to hear what she has to say.

2. At home in the early morning, while the rest of the house is still asleep, it's easy to sit with the Word of God and hear our Shepherd's soft and tender voice calling for you and for me.

At home in the late evening, after the dishes are washed and the house is put back in order, it's easy to sit with the Word of God and hear our Shepherd's soft and tender voice calling for you and for me.

But, in the street, the noise drowns out His voice and, overwhelmed by stimuli, when we need His security the most, panic strikes. Left unsettled, the panic builds like a storm until calamity comes like a whirlwind. Then, with our muscles contracted, coiled like compressed springs, and our lungs pumping like pistons, even though we may then seek diligently for the order and security Wisdom brings, like a snowball rolling downhill, chaos wins.

Solomon has accurately captured the effects of our noisy world on our mental, emotional, and even physical well-being.

We experience busyness in two arenas: external and internal.

External busyness is what happens around us. The noise of traffic. Children playing. News broadcasts. Keeping track of multiple open windows on your computer. Answering phones, emails, conversations. Planning. All of these external things created busyness.

Internal busyness is related to what's going on in our hearts and minds. Emotions, internal dialogues, fears, anxieties, hopes, joys, etc.

The external mixes with the internal. We might not live in the downtown core of a big city, but we are bombarded with noise, stimuli, and busyness every day. We live in a noisy world.

3. And, in the midst of that noise,

*Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.
At the busiest corner she cries out...*

The Lord wants us to connect with Him and find our refuge in Him.

For our mental, emotional, and physical health; for the good of our relationships and societies; for God's own glory – so that everyone we meet would know God truly, in the busiest parts of our days, at the busiest corners, Wisdom cries out.

“Give heed to my reproof”, she calls. She's begging anyone who'll listen to stop, hear her advice, and then return to the business of the day under her guidance.

*Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.¹*

And she promises, that when we not only hear her advice, but heed it, then, she says, you'll be able to conduct your business without busyness:

*those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.²*

Jesus never promised to remove us from the busyness of this world. In fact, just the opposite. In his prayer to the Father recorded in John 17 he prayed:

*I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to
protect them from the evil one.³*

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be our advocate, protector, comforter, helper, and teacher. The Holy Spirit would teach us what we need to know in particular times of our lives and would remind us of what Jesus wants us to hear when we are struggling in the chaos of an imperfect world. This, too, is Wisdom's task.

4. Solomon has painted a picture of Wisdom standing in the busiest part of town, amid all the traffic of daily comings-and-goings, the buying and selling in the town square, the discussions, debates, and decisions being made by the elders in the city gates, and amid the cacophony of city living, crying out to be heard.

When we read of Lady Wisdom crying out to us in the street, we read it not as another deity, but as the Holy Spirit, the divine breath crying out to us in the busiest parts of our days.

¹ Proverbs 1:23

² Proverbs 1:33

³ John 17:15

To not only *know* the wisdom of the proverbs, but to *recall it, embrace it, obey it, and be grateful for it*. To “choose the fear of the Lord” and plan your next steps accordingly.

It will be a healing for your flesh; and a refreshment for your body.

Glory be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
now and forevermore.
Amen.

We respond with prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Lord God, Loving God,
We come before you in prayer, trusting that your power works in the world
in ways we cannot even imagine,
calling goodness forward, supporting love, and creating justice
even in situations that seem hopeless to us.
Draw on our prayers as signs of your Spirit at work in our lives
God with an open heart,
Open our hearts to you.

God of the world and all its peoples:
we pray today for those who lift up their voices in troubled nations,
for those working to bring justice and negotiate peace,
for those bringing aid to the vulnerable,
and those offering shelter to anyone fleeing violence.

Keep silence for ten seconds.

Call the powerful to account, O God,
and inspire them to hear the voices that cry out in pain and desperation.
God with an open heart,
Open our hearts to you.

God of our everyday lives:
we pray today for our community and our neighbours
whose everyday lives have been disrupted
by months of pandemic restriction and response,
and by economic realities beyond their control.
We remember neighbours whose livelihoods depend on undependable weather
systems,
and those fearing fire, flood or drought this summer.
We pray for communities that lack safe drinking water or adequate medical care
and places where there is high unemployment or a worker shortage.

Keep silence for ten seconds.

Inspire leaders to combine compassion with good planning,
and consider the needs of all those who feel desperate
God with an open heart,
Open our hearts to you.

God of the courageous and compassionate,
we pray for those who live out their commitment to the well-being of others day by
day,
in public service, health care, education,
social work, community organizations, and environmental concern.

Keep silence for ten seconds.

Thank you for their dedication.

Support those who feel stress or exhaustion
and inspire those who can speak out when they see needs being neglected.
God with an open heart,
Open our hearts to you.

God of neighbourhood and nation,
we pray for friends and neighbours near and far,
for all who travel this summer
and for those who find themselves strangers in new communities.
We remember in silence those on our hearts, facing some kind of challenge this
day:

Keep silence for 30 seconds.

Draw near to each one in deep need, O God.
Equip us to support those lives that intertwine with ours
for we are your people, embraced by your love,
which we claim in the words Jesus' taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with God's blessing:

Hymn: #574 "With the Lord as my guide"

Blessing: