

Sermon Pentecost 17B
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon
All Saints, Mt. Pleasant
September 15, 2024

Proverbs 1:20-33

20Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.	27when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.
21At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:	28Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
22“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?	they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.
23Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.	29Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, 30would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof,
24Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,	31therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.
25and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,	32For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them;
26I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you,	33but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.”

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Imagine this scene with me: It's Saturday morning and you're relaxing at home. You have nowhere to go and no one expecting anything of you. You've just settled into your favorite chair a fresh cup of coffee, when all of a sudden...the doorbell rings. I'm not sure about everyone else in the room, but for me, my first instinct would be to run and hide. Cut off the tv, kill the lights, and hope the dog doesn't bark. I'm not expecting anyone, and I don't recall placing any late-night online shopping orders, so whoever it is can just go away!

I can remember a time when an unexpected knock at the door would have been welcomed, or at least not dreaded. I can remember a time when a knock at the door might have been a neighborly visit, an invitation to come out and play, or a cute little scout with their annual fundraiser. But these days, in the age of text messages and automated calendar reminders, I enjoy an unexpected ring of the doorbell about as much as a root canal. When I'm home alone, I want to be just that: alone. I do not want anyone interrupting my well-deserved peace and quiet, especially given how rare that is to find these days.

This season, we're back to using the less-common Bible readings found the semicontinuous lectionary, which this week bring us a reading from Proverbs Chapter 1. And the reading from Proverbs

introduces us - through the use of some vivid descriptive narrative imagery - to the character commonly known as “Lady Wisdom.”

In today’s passage, the writer of proverbs describes the Wisdom of God like a woman, wildly roaming the streets seeking out anyone who will listen to her. She’s pounding the pavement, careening around each corner, crying out at the gate of the city - but instead of open arms, she’s met with turned backs, cold shoulders, and locked doors. In the picture being painted in this passage, Wisdom is being welcomed just about as warmly as a vacuum-cleaner salesman ringing my doorbell early on a Saturday morning. We’re not home. We don’t want any. Just go away, and don’t come knocking ‘round here again.

I love the image of Lady Wisdom zig-zagging the city streets trying to make her case. She entreats God’s people: “Give heed to my reproof” She promises them: “I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.” She admonishes them: “I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded”...“you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof.” She’s begging for the people of God to stop being dense and deaf to God’s wisdom, But they’d rather stay holed up in ignorance, safely sheltered from God’s guidance and left in peace to heed their own impulses and desires.

Throughout scripture, we hear about the Wisdom of God, (though not always personified in this way). We hear the invitation to simple human beings to be taught, to be shaped and molded by a deeper understanding made available to us through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. The Psalmist admits that God’s understanding is far beyond what we could ever grasp or imagine, saying “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it... How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them— they are more than the sand...”

In the midst of the invitation we can never forget that even the wisest of theological scholars are only ever able to wade ankle-deep into the unfathomable depths of the wisdom of the all-knowing God. But through the study of the word, through the teachings of Christ, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the minds and hearts of each and every believer can begin to engage with wisdom of God. That is one of the profound mysteries of faith: Simple human being are invited into relationship with God, into participation in the kingdom of God, and to wade just a little into the infinite wisdom within the heart and mind and will of God.

That is, if we want to...if we answer the call...if we open the door instead of hardening our hearts to anything that threatens to disrupt our complacency and stretch us outside of our comfort zone. The call of Lady Wisdom - who cries out in the street to anyone who will listen - is for us to climb out of our burrows of ignorance to turn our attention away from our own self-centered desires and to open the door to a better way - the way of participation with the divine in deeper understanding of their will, in further awareness of the consequences of our actions in greater care for our neighbor.

I am so happy to be back with you all after a wonderful time away on sabbatical. (And to get my turn in the pulpit :) The purpose of pastoral sabbaticals is 1) to give ministry professionals an opportunity to engage in meaningful rest, 2) to give us all a chance to get some fresh perspective, and 3) to give pastors the opportunity to spend a little time seeking “Lady Wisdom” Some pastors take the opportunity to follow the footsteps of St. Paul in Greece of Luther in Germany or of Jesus in the Holy

Land. With little ones at home, we weren't quite at liberty to do those things...but we did enjoy the opportunity to get away to follow the call of Lady Wisdom in places a little closer to home.

We visited libraries and seminaries, We listened to different and diverse preachers, We read articles and books, interviewed leaders and visited with colleagues. And we just allowed the extra space and time we were given to free us up to listen for what God might have to say to us and the church today. And in that space and in our study and our conversations, this is what we heard:

Be authentic. Look around and see the gifts within this congregation. Recognize who we are, and who we are not. Do what you do well, and don't worry if it doesn't look like the congregation down the street.

Honor our differences. Whether we realize it or not, we are inhabiting a sacred space where people with differing perspectives all come together, kneel side-by-side to receive the Lord's supper. Recognize how rare this is in today's world, and respect it.

Listen to young people. They are not the church "of the future." They are the church of today. And one thing young people want to see is a church where people put their faith into action. If we believe it, we need to be "doing" it.

Get to know your neighbors. As the pastor at Greater Goodwill AME said to the tuesday evening study group last week: "We all expect to spend eternity in heaven. We shouldn't be meeting each other for the first time when we get there."

In summary: the churches who are actively listening for the call of God for them in this particular time in the particular places they are situated are acknowledging and honoring the gifts of the saints among them and getting outside to get to know the saints all around them. We look forward to unpacking those learning with you and with our leadership as we continue to live into our new five-year vision priorities.

I know we don't all get the opportunity to get away and quietly listen for the call of Lady Wisdom the way Pastor Kris and I got to during sabbatical, but we do all have the opportunity to decide what we will do when we hear her knock at the door. We all have the opportunity to decide whether to lean in to her call to grow deeper in our understanding of God's Word and God's will or to keep the door shut and just pretend nobody's home. We are all given the chance to decide whether to attune our ears to those calls God place on our lives - to respond, to act, to stand up - instead of ignore, turn away, and stay silent.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus calls it "taking up the cross." Laying aside the temptation to stay solely focused on ourselves and our own needs and desires, and instead taking up the mantle of community, of bearing one another's burdens of working together toward the greater good.

Believe me - I get the temptation to stay home, to hide behind the closed door and just pretend nobody's there. Especially when you feel like you're being pulled in directions and you just need a break from going out and "peopling" every day. I think this is what's partially responsible for the change in attitude to something as simple as a doorbell ring - It's the busy and over-scheduled nature of today's world. I get that - and we do want to promote the value of rest of taking breaks when you need them, to be refreshed and restored.

Sabbath rest is good. Jesus did it - he "retreated" from his work from time to time to rest and be restored in time with his heavenly Father. But after he rested, he returned. And after we find time to rest

our weary souls, then we are called to go on, to go out, to go deeper. After all, it's only in times of peace and quiet that we can hear the sound of someone knocking. And when they do, it just might be the call of God on your life. It just might be Lady Wisdom herself. So what about you? When she comes knocking, will you answer?