

2021 Sept 12 Rev. Sara M. Holland Sermon

Scripture: James 3:1-12 & Proverbs 1: 20-23

Title: "Wisdom Cries"

Theme: 16th Sunday after Pentecost, Wisdom for All: faith formation
Sunday. Sunday after 9/11 (20 year remembrance), Who are you, Jesus?

Introduction

If you have found yourself in church this morning or you are catching us online or on TV, you likely didn't just wind up out here. By this I mean that you probably ended up a part of this service with some sense that church would provide some purpose or meaning to your life. Or maybe you knew it would be an interesting cultural experience. I would guess that someone in your life or some experience in your life, at some point, gave you a sense that church might be a place to gain some perspective. Perhaps a person in your life offered you enough wisdom or helped you find enough wisdom to dare to seek on what may be construed as an idle Sunday morning in September of 2021.

Perhaps it was a parent or guardian in your life.

I was, as evidenced by the message for all ages this morning, granted the wisdom of silly poems by both of my parents. My mom was a librarian for a time and my father also utilized what some might name the gospel according to Shel Silverstein throughout his ministry.

Even as my memory will inevitably fade over time, the formative experiences I had with the Bernstein bears and reading Silverstein aloud and over and over and over will forever impact how I exist in the world and how I move and grow. These books granted me some wisdom much like our sacred texts do on Sunday mornings. *2 mins*

On this faith formation or rally Sunday, when we formally welcome our children and youth back from summer vacations and travels, we don't only name that we are here for them - we profess something so critical for communities like ours:

Much wisdom is found in the youngest. Children are the ones who are most apt to name the hard truth and to call us out in ways that make us uncomfortable. Kids and teens ask the hard questions from which we recoil.

Youth experience the world through their direct observations.

As we grow older and years pass, our view becomes tainted. The glass through which we see becomes smeared, dusty, cloudy, even dirty. Children have clear and bright visions of what can come with possibilities of tomorrow. The glass is much more clear for them.

Children are some of the ones we most need to listen to in order to find woman wisdom who is named in our scripture today.

The sometimes honest and rude. The sweet and caring. The chatty and imaginative. The hopeful and the deeply emotional. *3 mins, 20 seconds*

Wisdom is, indeed, personified throughout the book of Proverbs and speaks assertively. She is direct and to the point; the text makes it clear that God and Wisdom are intricately connected. Wisdom leading to God and God leading to Wisdom:

“I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.”

She, wisdom, cries.

Deeply emotional. It is hard to seek wisdom in the face of war, disaster and disease but woman Wisdom is imploring us to do this very thing. For this is one way we praise God. She cries. We cry. Considering verse 23 of the proverb for this morning we might see that: **God will be in our thoughts and wisdom will become a part of our being.**

Probably like many watching or listening this morning, I'll always remember what September 11th, 2001 was like for me. I was in 9th grade at North Davidson High School just south of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I sat in Physics class among my peers. I always had a hard time paying attention in Physics because I had a hard time in that class. But that day was different - it made sense that my focus shifted throughout the class. See sometime after we were in our seats, someone came to talk to our teacher and they ended up turning on the television, which each class had at that time.

I have a vague recollection of the teacher telling our class that the United States had been attacked and that, because of the attack, we would be watching the news to get updates. At the end of that class period, we were sent home. Because I was a relatively self-involved 14 year old, I do not remember anything else from that afternoon. I remember being outside and just wondering. I would imagine, wondering the same things many other adolescents wondered: Why would someone do this? What will this mean? How will this impact me?

My curiosity was relatively short-lived because I was a young adolescent and because I lived in North Carolina at the time rather than New England, I had little to no personal frame of reference besides TV. Since that day, though, I have been reminded through more personal experiences. In 2013, after I had 'met' adulthood - the day of the Boston Marathon bombing, I had been dangerously close to the largest explosion near the finish line. I can't imagine the struggles of the people who were near ground zero on 9/11 and too had, for some reason, narrowly avoided chaos. We remember victims as well as those who have or do experience survivor guilt from 9/11.

In 2013, it was my first year in seminary and I was excited to watch the runners. An excitement, perhaps, like a person might have that was happy to see the World Trade Centers for the first time. *~7 mins*

In Boston, I had decided that day to leave before all the runners finished so I was actually napping when the attacks occurred. I imagine the people who ended up not being physically at the World Trade Centers on 9/11 - maybe they were sick, they were traveling for work, or that day they worked from home. In Boston, when I woke up late in the afternoon, I saw loads of text messages and missed calls on my phone. We remember how we could not get in touch with people in and around New York City. People were checking in to make sure I was okay, and, I would imagine, they were reminded of 9/11. It didn't take long for me and the people closest to me to see the connections to the 9/11 attacks.

Many of my peers at Boston University's School of Theology had similar experiences - as we watched the news and rhetoric from all sources - we poured out our grief over years of war, the victims from 2001, and now our neighbors in Boston. We did our best to spiritually hold the pain of anyone who had been at or connected to 9/11 in more first-hand ways. All of us were connected in some way. Boston, a city that graciously welcomes students from all over the world year after year, was struggling. New York, a city that welcomes artists, immigrants, students, traders, so many people - this city we all hold today.

In 2013, in our large group discussions, we recalled the ways black and brown folks were now going to be under attack, once again. We wondered how to make sense of such horrible circumstances. There was but one place that I found hope in 2013 - that one place was in the community of wisdom. A community which acknowledged there would be no simple earthly way out of our human conundrums. *8 mins*

A community of wisdom is one which will certainly provide hope and this is one that we want for our children and ourselves in times of great uncertainty. When our breath stops short as we look in horror, a place to turn. This is the sort of community that we may continue to build in the world. A community that comes together and allows people to pour out their grief and sorrow.

Again, considering verse 23: God will be in our thoughts and wisdom will become a part of our being. For all of the tears that we may have cried in isolated rooms which were dimly lit in the past year - we must remember that these were not in solitude. For all of the tears that we may have cried in public spaces - these tears were not just our own, these tears are those which connect us to God. Remember, God is with wisdom and wisdom is with God.

Wisdom cries out in the street. She cries with us and we are not alone.

9 mins

A great tenet of our faith is our being in community - not just with each other but also with Christ. This week the larger church, the national UCC setting invited us to ask the question, "Who are you, Jesus?" When I read this question in the face of our deep human struggles and alongside our text in Proverbs, I am reminded of the deep and abiding presence of Christ. I am reminded that Jesus is not just intricately connected to wisdom, through the ways that he professed the Hebrew text, but that Jesus is with us, no matter what pain we experience.

God will be in our thoughts and wisdom will become a part of our being. The exact translation: "I will pour out my thoughts on you; I will make my words known to you." Wisdom is calling out to us in the cries of children and in our everyday lives, no matter our struggles. Let us continue to seek.