

Karen Hollis  
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Proverbs 8  
Wisdom of God

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus.

As I read the texts this week, at first, I was excited because this section in Proverbs is one of my favourites in scripture. And then I got really nervous; I wondered how I would talk about Wisdom and God because the text is not specific about their relationship. Looking to the experts gave context to the quandary, but offered no real help; they either echo the vagueness of the text or claim opposing viewpoints. Is Wisdom part of God? Is it a characteristic of God? Is it a helper with God? Is it the Holy Spirit personified? Can we still refer to wisdom as female, as the text suggests? Perhaps we find wisdom is in ordinary places in our lives because after all Wisdom was present when all of those places were created. And then one scholar says, yeah, there are problems with the text, but they aren't crucial. The text seems to speak uniquely to each.

While I was away, I did an online course called "Intro to Wisdom School" with Episcopal priest Cynthia Bourgeault. She is well known and loved in these parts. The Wisdom Tradition as she describes it has a central message about being awake and present for our lives, and Jesus came as a wisdom teacher. He came as God incarnate and woke up people who were oppressed and suffering, and challenged the establishment about their traditions and motivations and their practices that oppress others.

Jesus, as a wisdom teacher, comes to help us show up and be choice-ful about our lives. Even if there are truths in our lives that we cannot control, we still have choices within that reality. I have a friend whose adult child hasn't spoken to him since his divorce. Though that reality is out of his control, my friend still has choice about how to respond, whether it is to continue to reach out, love his child from afar, or something in between; he not only gets to choose how to be with that reality, but also engages God from within that reality.

In each of us is this ability to listen and discern what is right for us. What is that ability; where does it come from? In one of Cynthia's teachings, she talks about the importance of developing that sense of truth in one's self. It is absolutely important to have teachers and to listen to the wisdom of teachers, particularly at the beginning of one's intentional spiritual journey. But we can't rely on teachers to tell us the truths of our lives and relationship with God forever; we can't rely on experts to interpret texts for us, either. Each of us is able, encouraged even to engage the divine relationship that is true in us. How wisdom is a part of that relationship is particularly interesting to me. Let's go back to God's relationship with Wisdom for a moment. How did they get together? Did God create wisdom in the beginning? Or is wisdom a characteristic of God? The Orthodox church says that in the beginning Creator and

Creation had so much love for each other, that in sharing it back and forth the love overflowed and was the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is dynamism, itself, flowing, clarifying, wondering, delighting, dancing, loving, sharing truth in the moment that one might interpret as wisdom.

In our human world, we say wisdom comes from experience, and there's also truth to that. When I was a kid, I was convinced there wasn't anything my dad didn't know. He is very wise; he reads everything and has had lots of life experience. He isn't super talkative but is very thoughtful in what he says. He's the kind of person who everyone stops to listen to when he has something to say. His is a wisdom that comes from experience, from reflection . . . but there's something more. There's an element of wisdom that speaks to us . . . about what is right for the moment, the appropriate thing to say or not say, the right timing, the next turn or decision. One might say it takes life experience to learn to listen to this voice in us . . . some might even call it intuition, the voice of God in us. The voice is wise, isn't it? When we listen to it, we don't have regrets. This element of wisdom is perhaps most easily seen in people who engage the world differently than the mainstream, who are perhaps born with special needs or have special gifts to share with the world . . . sometimes we call them old souls. We are surprised to hear deep wisdom coming from the young and inexperienced, yet they are obviously tapping into something that is ancient and true and dynamic.

Because God is dynamic; God's work is dynamic. Think about the places in the world that do the most harm and have the widest oppressive reach; they are places that are stuck and unchanging, attached to power and control, they objectify the other. I saw this clip on facebook of a congresswoman speaking to a bank executive about how much the minimum wage of one of his bank tellers translates to monthly income, and how that compares to average monthly expenses. He most kept eye contact with her, though nervously shifting in his seat as she wrote on a small whiteboard, literally doing the math on this minimum wage income. I saw her doing her part to break into the hard exterior that holds his system in place. In contrast, when God is at work, God is dynamic; things are messy; there are moments where in the middle of it all we really don't know how things will progress. But in the dynamic, wisdom work of God there manifests healing, wholeness, reconciliation. And God delights. God delights that wisdom is manifest in each of us, because it keeps us safe, helps us set healthy boundaries, keeps us in relationship with others, and promotes healing and wholeness in our lives. The divine relationship in each of us is God's delight, to be with each of us, God's beloved children.