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### Wisdom

Proverbs 1:20-23, 8:1-11, 22-24, 29-31

Last week, one of our younger members, wise beyond her years, asked her mom why we only ever hear about Jesus here at church. “What about God?” she wanted to know.

Well, she has a point. Most of the time, Catherine and I preach from the gospels or from the writings of the apostle Paul. Every now and then a prophet sneaks in, but we do hear a lot about Jesus here. As I turned to this week’s lectionary passages, I heard a voice calling out to me – it was the figure of wisdom from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, sayings attributed to Solomon but probably compiled from many different sources. Much of it is written as poetry and aphorisms – but Proverbs also contains a compelling figure: Wisdom. Wisdom is a female personification of the divine. She stands tall in Proverbs, and cries out for humans to hear and heed her word. Listen now for a word from God.

(read Proverbs 1:20-23, 8:1-11, 22-24, 29-31)

The man looks up at the night sky and measures his hand against a blanket of stars. He finds the brightest one, due North, and from there, one constellation, and then another. His mouth opens in awe and his breath fogs the cold night air as he gazes upward. After all these years, he still feels so small looking up at the vast universe. He fits his tired eyes back to the telescope and begins his watch, his search, his measurements again. The work is tedious. His back is hunched, his fingers and toes ache with cold. But he keeps at it, night after night, because beneath the discomfort, way down deep, his weary search is fueled by wonder. He loves the untold mysteries of space, and is driven by a hungry desire to learn more about what’s out there. He has a hunch that the ordering of the stars and planets can tell us not just what’s out there, but what’s in here – more about ourselves and our origins than we might otherwise imagine possible.

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A few days ago, Hurricane Florence slammed into the Carolinas, flooding coastal communities and leaving devastation in her wake. Though stronger, more frequent storms are a byproduct of global warming, that isn't why I mention it. Did you know that the spinning spiral shape of a hurricane can be found throughout nature? It mirrors everything from the spinning spirals of galaxies down to the spiral of a nautilus shell – it's called a logarithmic spiral, and it's a shape that allows the spiraling organism to grow without changing its essential shape. Even the petals of a sunflower grow in this mysterious spiral, again and again it appears in nature – the repetition itself pointing to the hand of the One who made it, inspiring awe and wonder at the latent wisdom underpinning all of creation.

In the square, wisdom cries out – at the city gates, she raises her voice. She appears in the marketplace, on the highways and bi-ways, calling for people to listen, to hear and to heed her voice.

What is wisdom? The pursuit of knowledge, mastering technical know-how – that is a head game. That's not what we're talking about here. To seek wisdom is something deeper and more abiding than that. Wisdom lives in your heart, it's what you know deep down, in your bones.

At this time in human history, more information is available to us than ever before. We have access to a world of knowledge at our fingertips, it lives in our pockets and on our desktops. But I have a feeling that wisdom continues to walk among us, calling out to all people to seek what is right and true.

The Hebrew phrase which is translated “to pay attention” literally means “to set one's heart.” There are so many things that compete for our attention! Between screens and work, advertising and media, diversion after diversion, along with the relationships and commitments that bring life meaning and fullness and joy – our attention is a precious commodity. Where our attention is, our heart is also.

It is encouraging to me, then, that wisdom shows up in so many places. Is scripture telling us that wisdom is to be found ... everywhere? Does wisdom call out to us in the midst of ordinary, everyday life? Is there a voice that we can hear above and beneath and within the noise that surrounds us? A voice – or maybe something deeper, a feeling that warms our heart, a profound resonance that makes us stop, open mouthed, and gaze

woman wisdom and Jesus that I want to lift up. The gospel of John begins: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God.

Wisdom, too, claims to have been with God at the beginning: wisdom was the first act of creation, before the beginning of the earth. Wisdom is painted here as the mediator between God and humanity, God's mouthpiece among the people. Some scholars see Jesus as a continuation of this embodied wisdom of God among the people. Isn't that beautiful? Jesus, the incarnation of God, the link between God and humankind, embodies in part this strong *female* image of the divine.

The wisdom of Christ confuses our world, it turns our expectations upside down. Here, competition pushes us to be first and best- contrary to Christ's teaching that the first shall be last in the kingdom of God. The wisdom of Christ tells us that we must become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven – in awe at the mystery and wonder of the universe; joyfully seeing God's image in one another; compelled to care for all of creation. This week, I hope we will commit to pay attention, to hear wisdom calling in the midst of the marketplace, at the city gates, her presence spiraling out to wherever and whenever we are– shhhh... if we listen closely, we just might hear her, even now...