

SCRIPTURE for Time with Children: I Kings 3: 3, 5-15

Solomon loved the LORD and followed his father David's instructions, but Solomon also offered sacrifices and burned incense at the shrines. One night while Solomon was in Gibeon, the LORD God appeared to him in a dream and said, "Solomon, ask for anything you want, and I will give it to you." Solomon answered: My father David, your servant, was honest and did what you commanded. You were always loyal to him, and you gave him a son who is now king. LORD God, I'm your servant, and you've made me king in my father's place. But I'm very young and know so little about being a leader. And now I must rule your chosen people, even though there are too many of them to count. Please make me wise and teach me the difference between right and wrong. Then I will know how to rule your people. If you don't, there is no way I could rule this great nation of yours. God said: Solomon, I'm pleased that you asked for this. You could have asked to live a long time or to be rich. Or you could have asked for your enemies to be destroyed. Instead, you asked for wisdom to make right decisions. So I'll make you wiser than anyone who has ever lived or ever will live. I'll also give you what you didn't ask for. You'll be rich and respected as long as you live, and you'll be greater than any other king. If you obey me and follow my commands, as your father David did, I'll let you live a long time. Solomon woke up and realized that God had spoken to him in the dream. He went back to Jerusalem and stood in front of the sacred chest, where he offered sacrifices to please the Lord. Then Solomon gave a feast for his officials.

SCRIPTURE before Sermon: Proverbs 9: 1-6

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, 'You that are simple, turn in here!' To those without sense she says, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight (understanding).'

SERMON: "Wisdom's Invitation" The Rev. Barbara Kershner

How many of you have ever done a Google search? Information is literally at our fingertips! How many of you have ever taken a class online? Or listened to a podcast or TedTalk? There are lots of instructors out there. *But where is wisdom to be found? (Job 28:12)* Wisdom calls from the highest places. *Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.* Those words may sound familiar, but in a different context.

Wisdom calls. There are Wisdom traditions in cultures and religions from all around the globe. Christianity does not have the market cornered on wisdom. But because we use the Judeo-Christian scriptures, I will be talking a lot about wisdom that's found in the Bible. There are three books in particular that are called Wisdom books -- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

Proverbs is filled with common sense and advice that is not necessarily religious. For example, in Proverbs 17:22 we read: *A cheerful heart is good medicine.* Wise words. We also read: *Pride goeth before a fall.* (Proverbs 16:18) And my favorite proverb: *Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life!* (Proverbs 16:31)

The book of Ecclesiastes is also a book of wisdom tradition, and it also contains some proverbs, like: *The wise have eyes in their head, but fools walk in darkness.* (Eccl. 2: 14) And Ecclesiastes has some wise and beautiful poetry, like: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> wisdom book of the Old Testament is Job. And it is a story, a novella perhaps. It tells the story of a good guy who loses EVERYTHING – his wealth, his family, his health – all taken away. And then he debates with friends and with God as to why bad things happen to good people. Only the truly wise can understand and accept the difficult truths presented in the Book of Job.

In the Hebrew scriptures the word for Wisdom is, *Hokma*, and it is used in a variety of ways. Sometimes in scripture, wisdom simply refers to a physical skill or craft. In the book of Exodus, the people used their *hokma*, their craftsmanship, to create a worship space and garments for worship leaders. *Hokma* was embroidery, weaving, word carving and metal work and music. People were using their craftsmanship, their God-given skills, as wisdom. (Exodus 3:3-5) In the same way, all of **you** are wise or skilled in something – business or administration, writing or medicine, music or art, or whatever is your area of expertise. That is *hokma*, wisdom, as one way the Bible speaks of it.

As we heard in King Solomon's story earlier, wisdom also means making fair and just decisions that will benefit the common good. Wisdom comes to us, as it came to Solomon, as a gift from the wise and loving Creator, when we have the right attitude toward that Creator and toward creation. Again and again in these Wisdom books and in the psalms we are reminded that *'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'* Fear: awe, reverence.

Wisdom is knowing our place in creation, accepting the limits of humanity and understanding we are part of nature, that what happens to creation happens to us. That is wisdom. Fear of a higher power, honoring the ONE who is greater than humanity. Wisdom is awe, respect, recognition of the mystery of God. Not a mystery to be solved by uncovering facts. Not a mystery to be contained by doctrine or creeds. The Divine mystery evokes humility, trust, and reverence. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Wisdom is important in the New Testament writings as well, where the Greek word for wisdom is the feminine *Sophia*. The gospels present Jesus as a great teacher of wisdom from his infancy: "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom (*Sophia*), and the favor of God was upon him." As an adult, when the crowds in his hometown heard Jesus preach in the synagogue, they were amazed, but they were also offended. They said: 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him?' They knew his family and they couldn't imagine how this country bumpkin could become so wise.

In his teaching, Jesus often contrasted the actions of the wise and those of the foolish. The wise man built his house upon a rock -- you may remember that Sunday school song – but the foolish man built his house on sand. (Mt. 7: 24ff) The wise person stores up treasures in heaven. The foolish build bigger barns to store their stuff. The wise bridesmaids bring extra oil for their lamps. The foolish are unprepared.

Jesus was a teacher of wisdom. He had a deep knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures and often quoted the prophets and the psalms, but his true wisdom came in the way he applied those ancient words to his listeners and their situations. Jesus once compared himself to King Solomon: (Luke 11:31) He told the crowd: “The queen of Ethiopia will stand in judgment to condemn this generation. She came from far away to hear the wisdom given to Solomon. But now, something greater than Solomon is here, and you’re not listening!” Jesus used those old stories and brought them into people’s everyday lives.

And like Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, Jesus extends the invitation.

“If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink.”

“I am the bread of life; those who come to me shall not hunger.”

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

Jesus appears as the manifestation of Holy Wisdom, who invites us:

*Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.*

*Lay aside immaturity and live and walk in the way of understanding.*

The world today desperately needs understanding and maturity and wisdom. The earth and all its creatures need us humans to wise up, to look around to see what we are doing. Life on Earth can’t afford any more of our self-centered foolishness. It is time to respond to Wisdom’s call, to treasure her lessons, and savor Wisdom’s feast. We need to drink deeply. We need more than just a quick snack of information. We need more than bits and bytes. We need to sit at the table with all the other ancient wisdom traditions, with wise teachers from around the globe. It’s time to ask God for wisdom, so that our choices, our decisions, are for the good of all creatures, all people, not just a few bank accounts.

The wise gather to honor the great forces of creation, over which we have no power, to honor the Creator who made all things wise and wonderful. The wise gather to act together for the healing of the planet. The foolish gather to compete for power and money to be gained from the problems of the world.

Wisdom has built her house; she has set the table. She calls from the highest places: “*Come, eat of my bread and drink, and lay aside immaturity and live.*”

What will we do?