

2018 09 16 - Wisdom

Proverbs 1:20 – 2:6

Wisdom cries out in the streets; she raises her voice in the malls.

This is the image from today's reading: a woman, crying out in the street, frustrated and angry because no one is listening to her. How many of you have actually seen someone on a street shouting, trying to get the people who are walking by to listen? What were they saying? Do you remember? Were they preaching, trying to sell you something, asking for change? What did you think? How did you respond? I have to admit that I have encountered such people, both male and female. Sometimes they were Christians trying to save me, sometimes they were homeless and looking for help, sometimes it seemed that they were drunk or possibly ill. In each case, I have to admit, I turned my head, and I ignored them.

Is there any chance that one of them was Wisdom calling, trying to get my attention? According to today's scripture reading, if we don't listen to Wisdom then horrible things will happen. Wisdom tells us, "When you turn away from me, you're choosing death and your complacency will ruin you, you fool!" So what are some of the things that can happen when we ignore Wisdom? We can choose the wrong job or the wrong partner. We can take our business or our city or our church down a path that will lead us to destruction. We can make

personal choices that will hurt ourselves and the people that we love. Ignoring Wisdom can truly be a dangerous thing.

So let's assume that we want to do the right thing; that we want to make wise decisions; that we want to hear what Wisdom has to say. Where do we go and what do we do so that we can hear the words of Wisdom? I'm pretty sure that hanging out on a street corner or in a mall waiting for Wisdom to show up is not the answer. So where do we go? In today's world there is always somebody talking. There is no lack of opportunities to listen. All we have to do is turn on our radio, or our TV, our computer or our iPad or even our cell phone. But how to do we know what station to listen to, what channel to watch, what website to read, what Facebook page to checkout, what Twitter account to follow? We live in the age of fake news and alternative truth. Where do we find Wisdom in that?

Nearly every week I prepare a sermon. I choose a scripture reading, usually from the lectionary and then I go searching for inspiration, for wisdom. I read the notes in my study bible. I participate in our weekly lectionary group. I read what biblical scholars have to say. Sometimes I even check out sermons that other preachers have written. I search Google looking for what's being said about my theme in popular magazines, blogs and newspapers. . And as I'm reading I sift through all the words and the ideas. Some get discarded right away; others I ponder over. Some I may end up quoting; others I use to spark my own thoughts and words.

How do I choose what goes in and what stays out? Mostly I depend on my gut, I listen to my body and I determine how the words makes me feel. I ask myself, “Is this something I can say on Sunday morning with integrity? Is this something I truly believe? Is this something that I think needs to be said? Are these the words of Wisdom?” I believe that wisdom comes from within and that the only sure place to find our own truth, our own wisdom, is in our body, in our own heart and soul

We all have the ability to listen. We all have inner wisdom that we can offer to the world. I love the fact that the Bible uses a female personification of Wisdom, but I know that wisdom is not just a gift that women have been given. We all have this particular gift of the Spirit, every single one of us.

In July of this year, the 43rd General Council elected a new moderator for The United Church of Canada. His name is The Right Rev. Richard Bott and this week we received his welcome message to the church. In his message the moderator invites us to listen. He invites us to listen to our neighbours and, in particular, those people who have been marginalized by our church and our society. The moderator also talks about the importance of listening to the Spirit within each one of us. ([watch video](#)) He wrote:

There are so many things happening in the life of our church and in the world around us right now. Political changes, social changes, structural changes, and all of these changes, whether we think they're good or not, add to our stress. There's a phrase that I once heard used by a Buddhist teacher, a play on words that both makes me smile and gives me pause,

“Don’t just do something. Sit there!” It was their way of challenging the listener to stop and simply be until the moment was right to act.

For me, as a disciple of Jesus, those moments of quieting myself are a lead-in to the conversation with God that we often call prayer. So I’d invite you, in those moments when all of the change, all of the transition threatens to be overwhelming, “Don’t just do something. Sit there!” Listen carefully—to yourself, to your neighbour, and to God. Then act, and let your action be as full of your love and God’s love as you are able to make it! Let’s see where Jesus’ Way is leading us today. https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/transcript_moderators_welcome_message.docx

Our new moderator, recognizes that true wisdom comes when we listen, when we listen to ourselves, to our neighbours and to God. And it takes time and work to listen well. In Proverbs we read:

For if you yearn for insight, and cry out for understanding,
if you search for it as you would for silver and
dig for it as you would for buried treasure,
you will understand what fear of YHWH is, and
discover how to truly know God.
For YHWH alone gives wisdom,
from God’s mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

One of the articles that I read online this week was written by James D. Howell, a minister in the Methodist church in the United States. He shared a story about a person that he felt was particularly wise. Rev. Howell wrote:

One man in my first parish had an exemplary spirit about him — a brick-mason by day, stellar church member on Sunday, and a paragon of wisdom always. I asked him his secret. He, not surprisingly, did not think of himself as wise. He did report that, when he got home from work, he had some chores, and then he ate dinner with his family, they talked about things from the day and in the world that mattered, and then, every evening: "I go down in the basement, and pull up a peach crate, and sit on it and just think for quite a while." I recalled the evening before how I had, after dinner, switched on the TV and surfed for a bit.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/9256/weekly-preaching-september-16-2018?spMailingID=2038481&spUserID=Mzk4Nzk4MjY0S0&spJobID=620446861&spReportId=NjlwNDQ2ODYxS0>

No doubt many of us, like James D. Howell, are more likely to surf the channels, or the web or check out what's happening on Facebook. But this bricklayer, this man of wisdom would "go down in the basement... and just think for quite a while." I wonder what his thinking process was like. Did he ponder the issues of the day? Did he sit in awe of the world in which he lived? Did he let his thoughts wander wherever they needed to go? And did he eventually allow his mind to empty so that his focus could move to his body and that place of sacred stillness within us all? There is no doubt that he was listening to the words of Wisdom. That he was he listening to the wind of his soul.