# Wisdom cries out

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

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Proverbs 1:20-33, Psalm 19, James 3:1-12, Mark 8:27-38

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

Like everyone else, I am human. That means there was some first mother and some first father that I have as my ancestors. Each of my ancestors, and each of their descendants, followed the same path. We were conceived, we waited in the womb, we left the womb and started to breathe the common air. Probably the first thing I did was to cry out, and they wrapped me up and fed me. You too. Each of us.

No king, no president, no CEO, no celebrity started life any differently.

There is one entrance into life. There is one way out.

What I really want out of life is to be wise. I asked God, and the spirit wisdom started to come to me.

I could ask for power, but she is better. Power is nothing compared to wisdom.

I could ask for riches, but she is better. Riches are like sand or clay compared to wisdom.

I could ask for health and a good body to show off, but she is better. Her brillance never wears out.

And here’s the thing: by seeking after wisdom, everything good that I really need came to me. To my great surprise, she is the mother of all my health and welfare.

So I continue to seek after wisdom, and impart what I’ve learned without gruding.

May God continue to help me to be wise, for God guides even wisdom.

How much I need wisdom! The world is such a complicated place, ever changing but always the same: like the seasons which come and go. People are complicated; the spiritual world is complicated; there are secrets I need to discover, and things that are already manifest that I need to learn.

How can I describe wisdom?

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,  
unique, manifold, subtle,  
mobile, clear, unpolluted,  
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,  
irresistible, beneficent, humane,  
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,  
all-powerful, overseeing all,  
and penetrating through all spirits  
that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.

That was a paraphrase of the first part of the seventh chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon, one of the so-called apocryphal books that are not part of our Biblical canon (though the early Anabaptists were glad to read it). That last bit wasn’t a paraphrase, but a quotation from the New Revised Standard translation.

All of our lectionary passages this morning speak to wisdom, directly or indirectly.

The section from Proverbs, our first reading, is very much in the same mold as *The Wisdom of Solomon*. Here, Wisdom is a disappointed and spurned woman who warns everyone in the marketplace. She cries out that the natural consequence of following the way of foolishness: they will be fools. When life gets hard, they won’t be able to handle it. But, like the author of *The Wisdom*, seeking after wisdom will help them to be secure and free from dread.

Psalm 19, one of the most glorious psalms. We look to the skies above, and the earth below, and we seem to know, without anyone saying anything, that all this glorious creation points to an even more glorious creator. And the Creator of all deigns to share the wisdom of the Law, the Way, the *Torah*, with God’s servants.

James, warning people (like me) about the *dangers* of trying to share our wisdom with others. What truer statement is in the Bible than that little admission in verse 3:2 “For all of us make many mistakes.” Wisdom and foolishness pour out of our mouths. It is literally true that we use the same “tongue” to bless God and curse those made in the image of God, and this paradox shocks James, and should shock us.

And finally, this great passage from Mark – and found also in Matthew and Luke – where Jesus leads his disciples into a wise understanding of who he really is.

* He is the Messiah, which Peter and the other disciples have slowly come to understand.
* But he is the suffering servant Messiah, who will be killed.
* He rebukes Peter for failing to understand the deep wisdom of that.
* And finally, he says calls his disciples to follow him in his suffering.

Jesus calls us to the way of the cross. Like the Wisdom of Solomon, he is asking us to turn away from the pursuit of riches, of power, of health. He is calling us to stop trying to save ourselves. Even if we did save ourselves, and achieved everything the world can offer, what good would that be in the end, if we lose our souls and forfeit our lives?

Instead he calls us to follow him, to deny ourselves:

* To love God when we want to just pay attention to ourselves
* To love others when they are on our last nerve
* To learn, day by day, to extend ourselves a bit more in service
* To be unashamed of this kind of discipleship, in a world that calls us to follow our own desires, or different Gods, or even a different version of Jesus’s call that does not call for self-denial

Those who do this, and this is the promise of Jesus himself, will save their lives. This is the great Jesus paradox: what appears like a foolish way is true wisdom. To live, we must die. To receive, we must deny ourselves.

Wisdom cries out: follow the way of the cross.