

Wisdom

Proverbs 1:20-33

²⁰ Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.

²¹ At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

²² "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?"

²³ Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.

²⁴ Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,

²⁵ and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,

²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you,

²⁷ when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me.

²⁹ Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

³⁰ would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof,

³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.

³² For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them;

³³ but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster."

If the Proverbs have been marginalized, the church might at times confess that our wisdom has suffered a similar fate in the culture. Many eloquent voices make claims about how to live in the real world: talk-show hosts, cultural commentators, seminar leaders, life coaches. The church is but one voice among many, clamoring for the attention of the marketplace.

The writer of this proverb would have understood our challenge. "Lady Wisdom is a sage turned prophetess, a street preacher. She cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice" (Prov. 1:20). **Kenneth H. Carter Jr.**

Like one certain of the immense urgency of her words for her audience's well-being, she adamantly appeals for attention in the streets, in the squares, at the busiest corner, at the entrance of the city gate. These are the sites of communal life, of the bustling relationships of daily life. This is where Wisdom demands to be heard, not in the privacy of homes, the sacredness of the temple, or even the quiet recesses of souls. She calls for allegiance smack in the thick of work and play, at busy intersections where people gather, and at the city gates, where legal and commercial deals take place. Ordinary life with its drama and busy social exchanges, with its joys and disappointments, is Wisdom's domain.

Her tone is powerful because she knows that the consequence of deafness to her words is spiritual calamity. Wisdom is not particular about who follows her. She does not call the chosen, the holy, or the privileged, but invites anyone who will hear her. She calls to the "simple," the "scoffers," and the ones who "hate knowledge" (v. 22). She grows impatient because she has been calling to them for a long time. The scoffers and knowledge haters obstinately refuse to heed. "How long," she asks twice in her impatience, will they persist in their foolishness?

"Give heed to my reproof," she urges. But before she warns, she makes a promise, and that promise is nothing less than to reveal herself to everyone who listens. "I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you" (v. 23). To her listeners, she promises to disclose her mind, her inner life, to form an intimate union with them. She longs to be with them in mutuality, to find communion with them, and to become one with them. Wisdom calls everyone to a radical spirituality, to a way of being in the world and in right relationships.

Wisdom is frustrated because she has tried so hard to win the people to no avail. She called, stretched out her hand, but they would have none of her warnings. Because they turn away from the life she offers, she will turn away from them when calamity strikes and will laugh at their distress. They should have been pursuing her with the same intensity and absolute devotion with which she pursues them. This is the way to life.

Wisdom's call ends with a proverb, the first half of which concludes her reproof: "Waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them" (v. 32). With the authority of the wisdom of the ancestors, the proverb summarizes her warning. Failure to follow Wisdom leads to death.

The proverb's second half arrives finally at the benefits of listening to Wisdom's advice. Listening in the Proverbs is always linked to obedience, and obedience is participation in the practices that lead to wisdom: hearing and reading Scripture, prayers of confession and intercession, humility before others and God. This wisdom has very little to do with knowledge in service of power, and more to do with insight that is in service of God and neighbor. What she offers is true security, trust, and freedom from fear, because disaster will not come to her followers. The text implies that true security comes from relationship with her. She will not merely lead them, but will live with them, reveal her thoughts to them, be in kinship with them. She will accompany them and keep them secure. **Kathleen M. O'Connor**

So, how do the claims of God find a hearing in a culture that bombards its inhabitants with messages about the good life? Lady Wisdom raises her voice, just as a mother might with a resistant teenager. And so, the culture, as sophisticated as it is, also resists wisdom: "I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded" (Prov. 1:24).

Why does the culture (and the church) resist wisdom? The answer lies partly in the abundant wisdom that seems to surround us. We are overwhelmed with options, choices, and advice. In discouragement the church has often abandoned the tradition of practical wisdom, and into the vacuum have come the therapist and the manager, each of whom speaks clearly and confidently, often with the use of spiritual language and even religious authorization.

In an insecure world, this wisdom is grounded in the voice of God, calling us into the way that leads to life. This wisdom is present among those who live in communion with God's people and, at times, in resistance to the persistent refrains of the culture.

At times it seems life goes smooth, constant, almost boring. But at other times the winds and waves crash upon us, and we are aware that the resources of wisdom are either present or absent. The "fear of the LORD," which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7), is the experience of contact with a power greater than our own, before whom we give up control. A wise person knows that she or he is not all-knowing and therefore is in need of guidance; such a person possesses what John Calvin described as "a teachable spirit." This "fear of the LORD" is a form of humility or reverence, and, again, it is not obvious that such wisdom is valued in a culture that prefers power and control. **Kenneth H. Carter Jr.**

Wisdom shows up in our lives. Often, she shows up in a moment of need, a moment of crisis, a moment of fear. In the fall of 2006, she showed up for the world in the form of a grieving and forgiving Amish community. On October 2, 2006, Charles Carl Roberts entered a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. He lined up ten young girls from the school and shot each at point-blank range, killing five of them. In the face of this unspeakable atrocity, the Amish of Nickel Mines insisted that if they were to be true to their faith, true to their heritage, true to the memory of the innocent victims,

they must not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. They said they would find a way to forgive. They embraced and cared for the families of the victims and the family of the shooter. To a country that speaks the language of revenge very well, to a people often addicted to the hope of getting even, the Amish said there is another way, a better way. Their story is eloquent testimony to the truth that Wisdom shows up in our lives, often in ways we do not expect.

When we forget about the ways of God, we often get ourselves into some terrible predicaments. When we think we are beyond the basic lessons of loving justice, doing kindness, and walking humbly with God, we often end up doing things and saying things we regret. When loving God and loving neighbor as we love ourselves are mere platitudes for us, it seems that disaster often finds us. It will always be true that bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. It will also always be true that we have some responsibility for what happens to our families, our communities, our world, and ourselves. We need to pay attention to this brash messenger Wisdom and her insistence that "fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (v. 7a).

When people take time to listen to those they disagree with, they often find ways to move beyond tension-laden conflict, conflict that consumes and destroys. When we find ways to honor God—simple, time-tested ways like saying a prayer or going to church—we find that life can have a rhythm and cadence that feels right. When we recognize our need to forgive and be forgiven, we find a peace that is good for body, mind, and spirit. **H. James Hopkins**

For Christians, Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), and shares the Spirit who searches, knows, and understands all (1 Cor. 2:11-12) with those whom God has made children and heirs.

We will grow in favor as we grow in wisdom (cf. Luke 2:52). The wise and the foolish alike who begin anew in the kingdom of God can listen to Wisdom and find

new rest (Prov. 1:33; Luke 24:25-27). It jars us into sobriety (2 Cor. 11:16-19) and calls us into new lives of urgent vigilance. "Beware that no one leads you astray," Jesus cautions (Mark 13:5-37), and he warns of the risks of being unready for the Son of Man's sudden coming (Matt. 24:36-25:46). Like the Torah and the prophets—and apostolic teaching of James (Jas. 3:1-12) with wisdom from above (Jas. 3:13-18)—Proverbs is a training ground for entering and dwelling into God's future (Prov. 1:7, cf. 1:29). **Telford Work**

And so, wisdom cries out, in the church and in the culture; some resist the claims of wisdom, others become attentive to wisdom, over time, with hearts inclined to understanding (see Prov. 2:2). Those who reject the wisdom of God are lost, reaping what they sow (see Gal. 6). But for those who have ears to hear, there is the promise of the gospel: they will abide in the shadow of God's wings (Ps. 17:8), safe and secure, in the words of the hymn, from all alarms. **Kenneth H. Carter Jr.**

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