

Proverbs 1: 20-33 (Psalm 19); James 3: 1-12; Mark 8: 27-38; Season of Creation Week 2: Wisdom from Our Home Planet

Welcome to our second Sunday in the Season of Creation! As a recap, or for those of you who may not have been here last week, the theme this year is “A Home for All? Renewing the *Oikos* ((or “home”)) of God”, and last week we focused on “A Just Home for All People,” and that it’s part of showing our faith to make sure that all creatures have a safe and just home in God’s creation. This week, our theme is “Wisdom from Our Home Planet”.

Where do we find wisdom in our world? These days, many turn online for wisdom... with varying degrees of success! Some turn to trusted friends and loved ones, others turn to mentors or elders, those who have lived longer, seen more, understand more. Many turn to nature, or the world around us, to find wisdom. In a Christian context, we often turn to scripture to find God’s wisdom. Our first reading today comes from the Book of Proverbs, one of my favourite books of the Bible, and one that seems to often be underappreciated. In our lectionary, we only read from the Book of Proverbs 4 times, over the course of three years! And yet it contains a lot of wisdom to share, often in little tidbits that are almost like a catchy quote. You might actually be surprised by some of the ones that you recognize, which have become part of popular culture. I would encourage you to take a read through it, if you haven’t recently or before. There are exactly 31 chapters in the Book of Proverbs, so it breaks down pretty well into bite-size chunks, and you could read through it in a month if you read a chapter a day. It’s a great place to find wisdom.

The portion we heard today focuses on Wisdom, in this case personified as a woman, calling us to listen. Now, some of this section can be challenging to hear, with Wisdom saying things like “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when pain strikes you, when panic strikes you [...] when distress and anguish come upon you” and that “they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.” We don’t want to think of wisdom being absent from our world And yet, that may feel like the case at times. It seems as though few are seeking wisdom in our world, and therefore few are finding it. And, in many ways, it feels as though we’re in the midst of calamity or distress or anguish, and for many of us, it may feel like Wisdom – or even God – can be hard to find in this time. Those who do not adhere to Wisdom will be left on their own. And we’re even told “the complacency of fools destroys them.” We can’t sit around and be

comfortable, just because the rest of the world is. But the final verse is the one that brings us back to a place of comfort: “those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.” That’s not to say the disasters won’t come, but that those who listen to Wisdom – particularly the wisdom of God – will not dread whatever is to come.

There is wisdom, too, in holding one’s tongue. As we heard in our second reading today, if we’re not careful, our tongues, one of the smaller parts of the body, can cause huge issues for us as a whole. Our tongues can lash out, setting small fires as our reading suggests. Not always doing it by choice – sometimes something slips out before we think about what we’ve said – and I can’t help but think that’s because, as our reading says, “no one can tame the tongue.” With it, we can say good things or bad, kind words or harsh ones. “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.” But, our reading continues on to remind us that it really shouldn’t be so. What comes out of our mouth should reflect what’s in our hearts, so if what’s in our hearts is good, what comes out of our mouths should be good. Yet we know, from our Gospel reading a few weeks ago, that Jesus taught “there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” So while we know that what comes out of our mouths should reflect what’s in our hearts... we’re human, and unfortunately that’s not always what happens!

And then we have our Gospel reading, which features Peter, one of my favourite disciples, simply because he is often the opposite of wise, behaving in such absolutely human ways. In today’s gospel, he’s so wonderfully wise at first, being the disciple to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. But, shortly thereafter, he misses the mark completely, and after hearing Jesus explaining what’s to come for him, Peter tries to talk him out of it, going so far as to “rebuke him” – not a gentle thing at all! And then Jesus rebukes him right back, with those well-known words “Get behind me, Satan!” and reminding Peter that he’s focusing on the wrong things, the human instead of the divine.

Jesus then moves into one of the most important – and yet one of the most difficult – of his teachings: that in order to truly be his followers, we have to do three things, none of which are easy: deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Many of us may have that passage memorized, it’s an often-repeated one, but it’s one that’s so much harder to live out. Jesus is

encouraging us not to be concerned about earthly things, the things we own or want to own or wish we could do, and to focus instead on God. To sacrifice the cares of this world, sometimes behaving in ways other people may not understand, because we're living for the heavenly world. And that may mean forfeiting the "good things" – and I put that in quotes on purpose – of this world: the fancy clothes, the newest technologies, the expensive vehicles. Our world is very much designed for us to focus on material goods, to always be seeking more and newer and better, never quite satisfied with what we have. That's how we've gotten into the environmental and ecological problems in which we find ourselves now. And when we do that, we don't leave enough room in our heart for God. So we're called to give up those things that distract us, and return to focusing on God. Sometimes this means taking up burdens – or our cross – in the process, to follow him. Those can be huge actions, or smaller actions, but it means truly and deeply thinking about how we respond to things. Because, as Jesus says, "what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life," or another translation says to forfeit their souls. When it's put like that, the cares of the world sure don't seem as important!

So where do we look for wisdom in our world? There are a variety of places and ways to find wisdom on our "home planet", including from our home planet itself. But, as Christians, it's important that we make sure whatever wisdom we're finding or listening to lines up with God's will, and what God wants for us and our world. If the "wisdom" we're seeing or hearing doesn't? It might be time to take another look at it, and maybe consider finding a different source of wisdom. The wisest thing just might be for us to focus our hearts on minds on divine things instead of earthly ones. Not ignoring what's happening around us here on earth – because it's God's creation, meant to be celebrated – but turning away from the material things that harden our hearts to God. In this, we come closer to fulfilling the life God offers us all, spoken through the Word of the Gospels, made real in the world in which we live, made purposeful by the crosses we bare and those we share. Let us be one with the Spirit, mindful that we, each, are but one of God's creations. Let us prepare ourselves to be good stewards of our God given bounties as we continue to celebrate this Season of Creation.

Amen.