

Wisdom's Invitation     Prov. 8:1-4, 22-31

Some of you remember  
the Isley Brothers who sang this song,  
but as a kid of the 80's & 90's  
this is what I remember...  
(shampoo commercial)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3Wgj2bjxwA>

Salon Selectives.

What's funny is  
I didn't remember the brand,  
I actually thought it was  
an Herbal Essence shampoo commercial,  
but that song  
—it's an earworm, isn't?  
Who's that lady?



[In the commercials]

Her hair is so captivating.  
The shine, the bounce and the volume.  
Obviously if you use Salon Selectives,  
you are sure to have hair like this  
and be noticed too.

But isn't it interesting;  
the women in the commercial seem  
not just beautiful and therefore noticeable,  
but graceful, poised,  
playful, confident.  
Maybe it is the hair care  
*or maybe* it is something more.

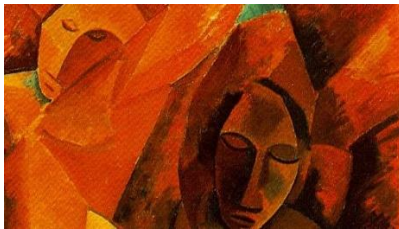
After hearing from Proverbs 1 last week  
and Proverbs 8 this week,  
we might ask ourselves,  
who's that lady?

Who is this mysterious siren  
calling out to us from the biblical text?

Today, we continue our series  
on the books of the bible  
concerned with Wisdom literature.

We move from, "...considering the fear of the LORD  
to describing the figure  
of Woman Wisdom."<sup>1</sup>

Who's that lady?



Proverbs 8 in takes a slight turn  
from the text we read last week.

Whereas wisdom was described  
as awe and the fear of the Lord,  
this chapter personifies Wisdom as a woman,  
and as one who calls to us not  
in the ways we might think of:

She calls,  
**not** in a still small voice  
within the private chambers of our heart.

She calls but **not**  
from the study carols  
of the world's best libraries.

She does **not** raise her voice  
in the silence of our prayer closets.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Schifferdecker <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/preaching-series-on-ot-wisdom-and-poetry-2/commentary-on-proverbs-81-11-22-36>

Wisdom does *not* offer herself privy  
to the only few who have worked hard and diligently;

To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live;  
**Wisdom, you see, offers herself openly  
to all creation.**

Because Lady Wisdom calls to us openly,  
where most often we think she calls to us  
in a more private and quiet setting,  
her calls in chapter 8 are from noticeably strategic locations  
—she calls from the heights.

We should hear *heights*  
and think of Wisdom calling from  
Mount Sinai or Zion or even the Temple.  
Which means Wisdom has a divine essence to her;  
she has some divine authority.  
Wisdom calls from beside the way,  
meaning she calls to us  
on whatever path we take,  
she calls to us in everyday living.<sup>2</sup>  
So, while divine,  
she is also common, available and present.

For me, though,  
the most comforting and deliberate place  
we hear Wisdom calling,  
is to hear that she takes a stand at the crossroads.  
Usually this is where most of us  
seek out for Wisdom, isn't?  
Whether we are standing at a real  
or metaphorical crossroads in our  
relationships, in our jobs, in our finances or futures.

This reminds me of another 90's reference:  
a song by Tracy Chapman called,  
Crossroads.

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<sup>2</sup> Sandra L. Gravett, <https://sandiesbibleblog.wordpress.com/2015/07/21/day-198-woman-wisdom/>

Chapman describes being at a crossroads  
wondering which way to turn.

Her song asks who will come find you first  
—devils or your gods?

According to Proverbs if we listen,  
even at a crossroads,  
we will hear Wisdom calling out to us.

She is found at the gates of the city—  
where in ancient Israel,

specifically men would gather to judge and debate;  
the gates of the city are where decisions are made;  
where many of the city's commercial  
and legal transactions took place.<sup>3</sup>

Isn't that an image we all need?

The trust and reassurance  
that where decisions are being made,  
even at the highest level,  
Wisdom stands there.

(now if those who are in power would just listen...)

Prophets often came to Jerusalem's gates  
to deliver a word from the Lord.

So, Wisdom, is also like a prophetess,  
“...who stands amidst the people  
and demands attention.

She does not work quietly,  
behind the scenes,  
but she is to be the guiding force  
in all-human affairs.”<sup>4</sup>

Who's that lady?

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<sup>3</sup> Jewish Study Bible, Adele Berlin and Marc Svi Brettler, eds. (Oxford University Press, New York, NY; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1999) Prov. 8:3

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Webb <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity-3/commentary-on-proverbs-81-4-22-31-2>



The second part of today's reading  
goes on to say that Wisdom plays a remarkable role  
with God the Creator.

Wisdom is prevenient,  
meaning she has always been,  
she has existed before time.

She reminds us  
that she was among the first creations of God,  
she was the first of God's many acts;  
she was there at the beginning.

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of long ago.”

This poetry reminds of the language  
of John's gospel, doesn't it?

*In the beginning was the word  
and the word with God...*

The language here in Proverbs 8  
plays with paternal ambiguity.

Several times the Woman Wisdom  
claims she was *brought forth*  
—in verse 8:24,

“when there were no depths  
I was brought forth;

in verse 8:25,

“before the hills,  
I was brought forth—”

in Hebrew '*brought forth*'  
is language of birthing, fathering, the act of giving birth.<sup>5</sup>

In the verse prior, 8:23  
Wisdom is “set up at the first,”

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<sup>5</sup> Juliana Claassens <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity-3/commentary-on-proverbs-81-4-22-31-3>

which is similar to the language of weaving<sup>6</sup>  
and the language of Psalm 139 comes into play:  
For it was you God, who formed my inward parts;  
you knit/wove me together  
in my mother's womb."

The language implies  
that God not only creates  
but births Wisdom,  
and that coupled with her personification in this text,  
leads us to see Wisdom playing  
an active role in creation.

She is speaking and sparking creativity  
and intimately interacting with creation itself.  
Wisdom collaborates with God,  
when she says,  
"I was beside God,  
like a master worker."

This master-worker or architect or even,  
hints at the ambiguity of language  
because this can also mean a little child;  
as in Wisdom describes herself  
as God's little child,  
beside God as God creates.

What is Wisdom's role in creation?  
Bill Brown, one of my seminary professors says,  
even as a child,  
"Wisdom is no passive observer...  
Wisdom makes her own contributions to the cosmos  
but it has nothing to do  
with the infrastructure or design.  
[Wisdom] provides play."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sandra L. Gravett, <https://sandiesbibleblog.wordpress.com/2015/07/21/day-198-woman-wisdom/>

<sup>7</sup> William P. Brown, Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God's Word and World (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 2015) pg. 59

The relationship  
between Wisdom and God  
is that of a close, ongoing-dynamic relationship  
between Creator and Lady Wisdom and creation.

Who's that lady?

The sea is mentioned and the mountains;  
the heavens and foundations of earth.  
But the only creature  
that receives the delight and attention of Wisdom  
are humans.

As those who are those created  
in the divine image of God,  
we are privy to the joy and delight of Wisdom.  
“When the Lord inscribed the foundations of the earth,  
I was beside him growing up.  
I have been daily his delight,  
playing before him every moment,  
playing with his inhabited world,  
delighting in the offspring of Adam.”<sup>8</sup>

Joy, delight, and play  
go together with Wisdom.  
There is a unique relationship  
between the Creator, Wisdom  
and the offspring of Adam.

What Proverbs tells us about the created order is  
that there are not just rules, commandments and covenants  
that make up our lives.  
It is not just order that makes up our world.

There is certainly the beauty and majesty  
of oceans and rivers,  
of mountains and rolling hills.  
It is not just physical beauty that makes up our world.  
These verses in Proverbs tell us  
that alongside the physical,

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<sup>8</sup> ibid

alongside the very necessary boundaries  
of creation and its functions,  
there is something else  
that God birthed and wove  
into the fabric of life itself.



There is a “playfulness associated with Wisdom  
[which can be seen as]  
an important theological principle  
that assumes that ‘pleasure and playfulness  
are built into the very structure of things;’  
[which] makes possible  
a spirit of discovery and generosity  
that implies ‘that Woman Wisdom  
opens up the world  
rather than closes it down.’”<sup>9</sup>

Playfulness and delight and joy  
are part of God’s intention  
for the created order of things.

Imagine then,  
a more robust and biblically faithful understanding  
of this world;  
a world that was created  
out of an abundance of love,  
created and cultivated  
for the flourishing of life;  
a world that has joyful playfulness built into it.

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<sup>9</sup> Juliana Claassens <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity-3/commentary-on-proverbs-81-4-22-31-3>



Imagine then,  
that the spirit of discovery and generosity  
are tied to  
and woven in  
the very air we breathe  
and ground we cultivate.

**Wouldn't** this kind of faithful understanding  
open up the world to new heights?  
**Wouldn't** this kind of biblical vision  
open up new pathways forward?  
**Wouldn't** this kind of divine guidance  
open up all sorts of exciting crossroads  
and wide-flung city gates?

“To revel in Wisdom’s world  
is to experience the joy of discovery,  
the delight of discernment,  
and the thrill of edifying play.”<sup>10</sup>

Mary Oliver says,  
“This is the first,  
the wildest, and the wisest thing I know:  
that the soul exists  
and is built entirely out of attentiveness.”

And who are better at being attentive  
to our world, than children?  
Children notice things  
because they are good at being  
attentive and playful.

The imagination of a child  
is a wellspring of possibilities.  
Think of the wonder and awe  
in watching roly poly’s  
or the stars come out against the night sky.

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<sup>10</sup> William P. Brown, Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God’s Word and World (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 2015) pg. 61

Our attentiveness  
to the world around us  
invites Lady Wisdom  
to give us a child-like freedom  
for exploration and wonder,  
for questions and curiosity,  
for creativity and expansive imaginative endeavors.

Wisdom allows us  
an openness to engage  
the world in delight and joy.

“This readiness to be open to new experiences  
also has theological implications,  
when believers are encouraged  
to ‘recognize that God  
may be about new things  
for new times and places.’”<sup>11</sup>

Aren't we always in need of that?  
A flexibility and eagerness  
that invites us  
to see that God might be about new things  
in new places  
for new times.

Why we might even begin to see  
and encounter  
God in new ways!

We often say, that wisdom comes with age.  
This is true,  
so true.  
But Wisdom's invitation to playfulness  
pushes us to engage her  
at all stages of life.

Wisdom calls to us  
to listen to each other and look for her  
in our children,  
our teens,

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<sup>11</sup> ibid

our grandparents,  
our young people,  
our boomers and millennials.

“To embrace Wisdom [then]  
truly is transformative  
[because] implies a whole new outlook on life,  
the universe and everything.”<sup>12</sup>

Lady Wisdom  
invites us into a close, dynamic, on-going, relationship  
with the Creator  
who gave her to this world.

Who’s that lady?  
(maybe play the sound clip again but not video?)

Benediction  
I came across a poster that said,  
Be playful  
Be present  
Be divine.

This in a way sums up the Woman Wisdom. Her invitation is always calling to us, wherever we are willing to pay attention and listen.  
And she invites us,  
With openness  
And joy.

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<sup>12</sup> ibid