

Text: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31  
Theme: The Personification of God

“Does not Wisdom call? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud: ‘To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man...’”

Greetings again, dear brothers and sisters in the name of the eternal Christ. “Wisdom calls.” A couple of years ago when Marilyn and I visited the ancient city of Ephesus, our first stop was at a site supposedly the home of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Legend tells that the disciple John took her there with him when he started a church in the city.

It sat on top of a hill overlooking the ancient city, a peaceful spot with a grove of trees surrounding the little shrine built over the remaining foundation stones. We quietly wound our way through the little area enjoying the quiet surroundings.

Which were quickly spoiled, the peace shattered by the incessant hawking of a number of street vendors who had quickly noted we were Americans and surrounded our group shouting out, “Hey, mister! I’ve got great cigarettes here! Want a nice scarf for your wife? Look at what I’ve got here! Almost free ! Not much money. Postcards! Bookmarks! I got it!” And I bought some.

OK. You get the picture. Now visualize that the Book of Proverbs says that “Wisdom” is just like those annoying street vendors. Lady Wisdom sits at the gates of the city shouting, hawking her wares, screaming out to everyone to come get some wisdom from her.

Not a particularly uplifting image of Wisdom, is it? Especially if you’ve sat in on some of my Bible studies on Proverbs and recall that Wisdom here is a type of Christ.

I’m going to let you in on a little preacher’s secret. It’s not really one they teach at seminary. Whenever in a sermon, we preachers lack a cohesive argument,

or even a point that is worth making, we preachers find it helpful to fill the sermon with as much hot air as possible, put up a sermon title like “The Personification of God.”

And you love it. You tend to think that “religion” is about something vague, “spiritual.” Spiritual is when we all get together and are as nebulous as possible, ethereal, and indistinct. Thus we preachers dump a mess of generalities upon the congregation – redemption, atonement, inspiration, love, liberation, sensitivity, spirituality, blah, blah, blah – and we all come away feeling that something has actually happened in the sermon, although just what happened we couldn’t say for sure.

And that makes today’s lesson from Proverbs all the more remarkable! It’s Trinity Sunday. And if a preacher can’t be obtuse, vague, and fuzzy on Trinity Sunday, when can he be? What Christian doctrine is more incomprehensible than the Trinity?

And yet today’s text from Proverbs is uncooperative. Proverbs refuses to be “spiritual,” or otherwise elusive and indistinct. Today’s text gets positively personal. In this morning’s text, the concept “Wisdom” is personified, made into Lady Wisdom. The Hebrew word for “wisdom,” *hokmah* is made into a human being, given a face, a voice.

Compare this sort of personification with how St. John opens his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God...” These are beautiful phrases, noble and uplifting. These are high-sounding phrases floating somewhere between the moment of Creation and where we are now – which sadly is almost nowhere.

But then John’s Gospel becomes almost alarmingly concrete: “And the Word became flesh.” Flesh. Meat. The Word, that eternal Logos is personified, embodied, and takes on undeniably, unavoidably physical form. God’s eternal Logos is a Jew from Nazareth.

OK. Something like that is happening here in Proverbs – Wisdom is made flesh. “Wisdom” is a noble word. But who really knows what we mean when we say “wisdom”? Here Wisdom is more than a concept, an idea, or a generality. Wisdom is an attractive woman who calls people to follow her, to receive her gifts. Wisdom stands before us, right smack in front of our paths, personified, and gives a long speech, offering a list of all the gifts that she bestows. Wisdom not only stands there before us but also reaches out to us, beckons us, allures us. Lady Wisdom claims that she was present at the very foundation of the whole cosmos. Wisdom says that she is at the bottom of all true reality.

Truth has a face, a name, “Wisdom.” Truth is not simply a set of ideas, a concept. Truth reaches out to YOU, speaks, beckons, and stands there undeniably before you, making a personal claim upon you. I ask you, what if Truth had a face, a name? What if truth was not merely an abstraction, but a personality that reaches out to you? What if Truth were more like a person than an idea?

Truth that dares to speak to you, that reaches out to you, is Truth worth knowing. Sometimes when some truth really comes to us like a lightbulb we say “I got it!” But perhaps what we need to say is “It got me!” This Truth reduces all the philosophies of man to meaningless in the reality of Jesus Christ Incarnate.

We Christians don’t just believe in “God” or “Spirit.” We believe in the Incarnation. We believe that god refused to be God by Godself. God became flesh and moved into His creation with us. God refused to be relegated to the realm of the vague and the indistinct. God has a face, a name, Jesus Christ the Crucified. Something amazing and wonderful about this God refused to be God without us.

Lady Wisdom presages the Incarnation, Jesus Christ. Our God doesn’t just love us. God comes to us, speaks, reveals, and reaches out to us when all the while we thought we were reaching out to God.

But I think you know this already. That’s why you are here this morning. You are here in Church, not for a philosophical lecture, not for an enumeration of all the benefits of the Christian faith. You are here hoping to be met by the Word made Flesh.

True worship, in the name of the God we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is always incarnational, personal, and embodied. The deity of the gods of the Greeks was a godliness of distance, aloofness. God? God is high, lifted up, distant, and unapproachable. But the God who met us in Jesus Christ is godly precisely in His nearness, approachableness, availability, and self-disclosure.

Thank God that our God did not wait for us to come to God, but came to us, God With Us, Immanuel. The Christian faith is what happens when we are encountered by a Person who says not, "Think about Me," but rather "Follow Me!" This, said Bonhoeffer, is the whole point of a sermon. A sermon, said that great Christian martyr, "enables the Risen Christ to walk among His people." Don't you agree? A sermon is best, not as a listing of spiritual insights, a warm but fuzzy feeling engendered in people.

A sermon is a sermon when it is used by God With Us as a means of intruding, invading, and walking among His people. In a former church there was a man who drove an hour each way to be with us on Sunday morning. And I finally asked him why he made such an effort, hoping perhaps he would answer something like "Why because of your brilliant preaching!"

He didn't. In fact, to my dismay he said, "You know, most of your sermons are right over my head. I only get maybe one in four." So why do you come, I asked? "Because," he answered, "almost every Sunday I meet Christ here. Somehow, somehow, Christ comes to me, speaks to me, and I go away refreshed and committed to follow Christ."

Dear brothers and sisters, Lady Wisdom reaches out to us again this morning, beckons us. And so does the Word Made Flesh. Thank God our God was not content to be "spiritual." Our God gets personal. He abides among us. He calls us. Come to My Table, in bread and in wine, He is here. In the living Word, He is here. In the fellowship, the Body of Christ, He is here. And maybe, just maybe, even in the preaching. Amen.