

Lessons:

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16
Canticle A (Wisdom 6:17-20)
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

Wisdom – love more than we can ask or imagine

My daughter, Ereina Christin, and I had a bedtime practice that became an important ritual

- It was a game of “I love you even more!”
- Ereina would start it - holding her 3 yr. old arms wide
 - “I love you THIS much”
 - I had a distinct advantage in arm spread: I love you THIS much
- Later we’d play the game while out walking
 - height was the measure...& jumping was allowed
- When a custody agreement separated us by the width of the nation
 - I would draw a heart carried by three balloons on a card every week, to show Ereina my love for her travelling over huge spaces

Our first lesson reminds me of that: how Wisdom – Sophia in Greek – goes to any length to reach us, as we read:

She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.

*One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,
for she will be found sitting at the gate.*

*To fix one’s thought on her is perfect understanding, &
one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care,
because she goes about seeking those worthy of her,
and she graciously appears to them in their paths,
and meets them in every thought.*

This passage is from the Wisdom of Solomon, one of the Apocryphal books

- There are more than a dozen books which are recognized as important but not divinely inspired Scriptures by Jewish & various Christian traditions
- These books appear in some translations between Hebrew Scriptures & NT

- This one – Wisdom of Solomon – was written in Greek
 - No copy of the manuscript has been found in Hebrew
 - Definitely excludes it from the Jewish canon

The context for this author appears to be:

- Alexandria – capital of Egypt for about a thousand years
 - Founded by Alexander the Great in 4th Century BCE
 - Ruled by a Greek dynasty following him
 - conquered by Rome in 30 BCE
 - served as the capital of the Roman province
 - Jewish community was very strong – translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek took place in Alexandria between the 2nd & 3rd centuries BCE
 - The city was a unique confluence of Greek/Egyptian/Jewish cultures
- Our text was probably written in the middle of the century before Christ's birth
 - Author demonstrates deep knowledge of Hebrew scriptures while using Greek philosophical structures
 - Specifically, a type of Platonism linked to stoicism which was strong from 80 BCE to 220 CE
- The author's intent is to pose the question:
 - In a sophisticated place with a multitude of faiths and philosophies to choose from: how/why do we claim our faith as Jews in this context?¹
- Similar question for us today – how or why do we claim our faith as Christians in our own context?

I must admit: I was adamant that we use this reading today

- We had a choice of three readings for our first lesson
- Today is one of only five times that passages about personified Wisdom could be read over our three year cycle of Sunday lessons (plus 2 feast days)

¹ Richard J. Clifford, S.J., New Collegeville Bible Commentary: Wisdom, ed. Daniel Durken, O.S.B. (Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2013), 9.

- That's five times in over 150 weeks!
- And we get the wonderful image of Sophia eagerly reaching out in today's reading:
 - *...she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.*

Wisdom and Logos interweave in both today's book & the earlier (canonical) Book of Proverbs

- In the Book of Proverbs, written in Hebrew:
 - Wisdom is a feminine noun *chokmah* (חכמה)
 - In chapter 8 (read on Trinity Sun.) feminine Wisdom describes herself being before the creation in ways that parallel Jesus as the Logos, the Word of God, in the beginning of John's Gospel:
 - We have Wisdom (feminine) describing the order of creation as listed in Genesis and concluding
 - *"Then I was beside Him, as a master architect; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing (or "playing"!) always before Him; Rejoicing in the world, God's earth, and having my delight in humankind"*²
 - And John says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through the Word, and apart from the Word nothing came into being that has come into being."
 - But we know the Word was Jesus, and Wisdom is feminine...how can we have both masculine and feminine descriptions of the one we recognize as the Second Person of the Trinity??

Today's reading is one of the reminders I need

- that our language describing the Holy One is always too narrow
- we can't capture the truth or proscribe the love with which God loves the cosmos.

² Julianna Claassens, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2858

I see Sophia reaching out to us, pointing towards Logos or Word incarnate described in the Gospels:

- The Holy One choosing to be born as a human being
- Laying aside divine power to walk with us in all our limits
- Taking on the sins of the world
- Submitting to the crucifixion and, even in that agony, demonstrating love by speaking to the needs of his mother and favorite disciple
 - telling John to take Mary in to his home
- and then conquering death and turning our world upside down

This passage about Wisdom is, for me, about the Holy One reaching out to us

- Loving us more than we can ask or imagine.

I see the parable of the wise and foolish young women in today's Gospel reflecting on how we might pay attention or prepare ourselves to join in the celebration of God's love.

- I suspect that you, like me, alternate between being prepared and unprepared to greet the bride groom – known to us as Logos or Wisdom or the Christ
 - We might be distracted...focused on temporary or selfish goals
 - We might be confused...not sure Who this Christ is
- Or, on a daily basis, we might ask ourselves:
 - Are we willing to distill our longing into the oil which keeps our lamps burning?
 - Are we willing to get out of our own safe little spaces, go into the public places where Wisdom is eagerly waiting to meet us?
- Perhaps most importantly:
 - Will we allow ourselves to hear Wisdom calling?
 - ...and how will we respond to the embrace when the Holy One reaches out arms of love, tenderly saying: "I love you THIS much"?