

Reflection: God's Architect
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8

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I happened to encounter a group of people at the pre-Olympic Torch Relay as it was winding its way down the streets of my neighbourhood—but I know that you too have likely encountered a similar group of people elsewhere. They show up outside sporting events, film festivals, outside clinics and pride parades wherever there are large groups of people assembled.

This group stands within the Christian community but maybe in a different spot on the spectrum than where we stand. These Christians take what I tend to call, and you will hear my judgment, a carpet-bombing approach to evangelism. They show up in the crowds and they quietly hand out (often glossy) pamphlets about Jesus without necessarily establishing eye-contact with the recipient—handing out as many pamphlets as people will take.

The reaction is often the same. People innocently take the pamphlets—not aware of what they hold—then once they read them, discard them a few steps or blocks down. I call it the carpet bomb approach as there seems to be no apparent regard for who their audience is, nor the tradition or particular perspective the recipients bring, they simply want to get their information out.

The pamphlet I received after the Olympic torch gathering was passed to me by an older gentleman. When I realized what it was about I called him back to ask about his intentions. The paper said something about the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I asked him if he really wanted to share the gospel was he open to conversation with me about that. Not too far into the conversation he brushed me off—turning his posture toward more passersby to hand out more pamphlets—spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. I was merely a pesky fly in his peripheral vision.

The people who take this approach to sharing/revealing Jesus could argue that they are doing more to proclaim than I am—and they may be right. And their approach may be successful in that they simply might hit the right person at the right time who really needs an invitation.

But there is also collateral damage. There are people who know the second they look at the pamphlet that they are excluded from the Jesus group for one reason or another. Or there are those who feel violated because there is no regard for their own journey in faith—they are simply seen as people who don't yet get it. But what I truly wonder—is it an invitation that is authentic or is it simply trying to give Jesus to people instead of call them to relationship. Does it give any regard to the stranger and the wisdom of God therein—now you know I'm talking about United Church evangelism at the other end—no matter what else—do not risk offending anyone!

We are invited, through a not commonly read book from scripture, to hear about God in a not so common way this morning. And maybe the voice interrupts us in a similar way to the Christians groups I spoke about—but I hope with a different outcome. The invitation is not to Jesus but to Wisdom. In the middle of a great poem which starts the book of Proverbs we hear of God’s wisdom personified. Here she stands, we are told calling out in the midst of life:

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 out:
‘To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.

She is in the middle of the hustle and bustle of life calling out to all that live—come, pay attention to me and find me. This image is meant to cut across any familiar sense of finding God on our own time and instead has Wisdom standing right in the middle of the public spaces—at the crossroads not in a secluded place with secret teachings but at the thresholds calling to all who live. A paraphrase of the passage in the Message bible says:

Do you hear Lady Wisdom calling?
Can you hear Madame Insight raising her voice?
She's taken her stand at First and Main,
at the busiest intersection.
Right in the city square
where the traffic is thickest, she shouts,
"You—I'm talking to all of you,
everyone out here on the streets!

This introduction of Wisdom is intentionally given to us on what we mark as Trinity Sunday—when we embrace all the ways God is known to us. It attempts to reach the heart expressing the present, active, known-right-here God. After her introduction, Wisdom (or Madame Insight) begins to describe how she was present as a master-worker or architect with God in creation—set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. Right at the beginning, Wisdom was in on the beauty and the rightness and the purpose of everything God made. (*Weekly Seeds, Kate Huey*) If you have seen the actual painting (or pictures of Michaelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* you might have noticed that in the crook of God’s left elbow there is a woman who accompanies him in his act of creation. Some interpret this to be Wisdom—as talked about in today’s passage.

So the passage suggests that right from the start God’s wisdom established the way things are and everything is infused with the architect’s characteristic designs. This is not a detached creator but intricately linked in every element of

design. And the invitation, as if we were looking at a building and we were trained to identify the marks of a particular architect—is to hold the entire universe with eyes of wisdom and to see her fingerprints in everything from vast oceans to DNA.

And the purpose of this training of our eyes and our hearts is not in the interest of selling us a package—even though Wisdom does stand in the crowds and the go-to events—but rather to call us to relationship. It is a call that beckons us into a deeper living in God and to a certainty of the wisdom of God within everything.

I was sitting in a coffee-shop this week and it was one of those moments when the conversation at the next table was dominating the small section of tables and chairs. I overheard three men talking about the days events and life in general.

I started to tune in when I heard them discussing the oil spill in the Gulf. They began talking, like we all are, about the latest failed efforts at stopping the leak. Then one person raised the question as to whether the other two had any stocks in the oil company. He said he had decided he was going to buy oil stock right now because given this disaster he was certain oil prices would skyrocket and there was money to be gained from the situation. I was shocked at his perspective and clarity on the one hand.

Most conversations I have heard have only been about the trauma and horror at the devastation. I know that I am almost too afraid to open my paper each day fearing news that another repair technique has failed and oil continues to pour uncontrollably into the sea, the marshlands, the beaches. I fear images of more oil stained marine animals and birds and loss of livelihood for others. Stock prices seem an irrelevant topic. On the other hand we are all steeped in a relationship, economy and system that teaches us how to extract more and more from the earth resources. The man I overheard was functioning from that reality.

I might be just as wise to review my own inability to alter my use of oil and convenience at the expense of the planet. But it is here too, in the destruction, where the God of Wisdom stands, perhaps unrecognizable from slick and debris—calling amidst the hustle and bustle for us to notice God's handiwork and to appeal to our own wisdom to stand in awe and wonder and deep reverence rather than the folly of consumption and isolation and with eyes diverted hoping not to really see the consequences.

In a conversation I was having after last week's service of worship where we played with the Holy Spirit—reminding ourselves that God's Spirit cannot be contained in the church—someone was reflecting on those moments in the service given us by you who were Witnesses to the Spirit in our midst. She asked/pondered/wondered whether we could only see the Spirit in the moments of joy and good and positive. My suggestion is no. Those moments do need to be

witnessed to and we so desperately need to hear them from each other. But so too the Spirit stands in the forgotten places—calling confidently for us to see the designer, wisdom’s imprint everywhere calling out our own wisdom. There is the Holy Spirit beckoning us to relationship—to see divine fingerprints on everything and everyone so that we can’t dismiss or consume it but stand, instead in reverence and gratitude. Hearing and Seeing God’s wisdom trains our eyes to see it everywhere. And such wisdom gives us a posture of truthfulness; wisdom gives the ability to see right from wrong, wisdom gives life. So perhaps the places most full of devastation need our trained eyes the most to wash off the stains that hide it and hold the life that it gives.

Trinity Sunday is an inheritance we receive from our church tradition to embrace the fullness of God and the relationships of God. Our United Church *Song of Faith* offers wisdom in these poetic words:

God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.

Yet,
in love,
the one eternal God seeks relationship.

So God creates the universe
and with it the possibility of being and relating.
God tends the universe,
mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.
God enlivens the universe,
guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.

With the Church through the ages,
we speak of God as one and triune:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
We also speak of God as
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer

God, Christ, and Spirit,
Mother, Friend, and Comforter,
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,
and in other ways that speak faithfully of

the One on whom our hearts rely,
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe.
we cannot keep from singing.

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom ...

May it be that we accept the invitation to do so...