

# “Seeking Wisdom?”

(Based on Trinity Sunday and Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31)

I find it curious how most folk tales often invite us into stories about the need for wisdom or how to solve a problem. My daughter Lauren was recently in Nova Scotia for some holidays, and she returned home with a book by Helen Creighton called, *A Folk Tale Journey*. The book captures folk stories told throughout the Maritimes. I have just started to turn the pages on this treasury of tales, but here is one of the wisdom stories...

It is called, “Shake hands with the Donkey” as told by Hedley Doty from Yarmouth, N.S.

“The story is told as we know they are about an old Middle Eastern man who kept his fortune in a cave. He had several servants. Somebody stole the treasure. Nobody knew where the treasure was but the servants, and none of them would admit to having stolen it. So, the man whose treasure was gone went to a wise one and asked them what to do. They said,

“You have a pet donkey. Tie the donkey in the cave.” They whispered something else to him. “Then line your servants up, tell them that your donkey is well trained and can always distinguish a thief -- whenever his tail is pulled by an honest man the donkey will remain quiet, but if a thief pulls donkey’s tail it will bray.”

The owner of the treasure and the donkey then told the servants to go in the cave one at a time and pull the tail. All proceeded in turn and came out again. There had not been a sound out of the donkey. The owner of the treasure said, “I can still tell you who the thief was, but to show that I am a just man and am not nursing any hard feelings, I will shake hands.” He went down the line of servants and shook hands. After had done this, he selected one of the servants in the group and told them it was all a trick, that this servant was the guilty one and had him thrown in jail. How did he know?

The owner had put paint of the donkey’s tail, and all touched it but the guilty servant which of course gave him away when they shook hands – his were the only ones without paint on them. *P. 52, 53 adapted*

These type of wisdom tales are told by many a storyteller and they invite us to problem solve, to think outside the box and to ponder what we might do. Paint on the tail -- clever!

*“Does not wisdom call, and 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 out:  
“To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.” Proverbs 8:1-4*

This morning we hear Wisdom is calling out to us. She wants us to notice, to see her seeking us, to have us take notice. Wisdom is not hiding away from us, but stands ready for us to embrace her. Wisdom is before us.

What do you think she wants us to notice? What secret does she wish us to discover? Perhaps we should look at little closer at the Proverbs.

This book of the bible is a collection of sayings. They are often practical pieces of advice that a parent might share with a child. Some we may agree with and others we may challenge by today’s standards, but still there are nuggets of life and understanding that are being offered to us. Here are a few:

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”

“How useless to spread a net where every bird can see it!”

“Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.”

“Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred.”

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.”

If you read more of the book, you find many extolling statements to seek wisdom, listen after God, to chose right paths, to embrace honest ways. Part of wisdom is to find our relationship with God and nurture it, acknowledge our mistakes when we don’t, look to learn and look for folks who are good role models. It also points out the challenges when we don’t.

Today we find ourselves being invited to consider wisdom and its role in creation and with God.

We hear: “Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—

when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.  
When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,  
when God assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

We hear about wisdom's delight with God and with us. Is this what we are to discover in the cave? Is this what we are to notice from the Proverbs 8? Wisdom was with God in the beginning of creation, and she is delighted.

One commentator suggests that wisdom is dancing with joy! Being with God offers us joy. Wisdom wants us to experience this delight. We can find it as we notice the beauty of creation, as we walk with God, as we build good relationships with others. Wisdom desires us to dance with God.

Really? I thought God was about serious stuff. No clapping hands in church. No kids running around. No laughter. Once this was certainly more common an experience in church settings. Don't sound like much fun. I sometimes wonder if this didn't turn some folks away from attending church because it didn't bring joy or a closeness to God for them. Perhaps we got the dance steps wrong.

When Jan and I were living in Arthur, we decided we needed to do something as a couple. We took dance lessons at the high school across the street from our house. We were to learn the waltz, the fox trot, the jive to name a few of the classic dances. It can be painful as first to learn to dance. For one there is a tendency to step on the other's toes and sometimes one of the two of you have to let the other lead. Two leaders don't work great. The biggest part of learning to dance together is to relax and have fun with it. When you are uptight and nervous about making mistakes, you can turn into a grumbly partner (action: pointing at myself). But if you can smile and laugh at your learnings, even the learning can be fun.

I wonder if that isn't what wisdom wanted us to know as she shouted out to us to notice. There is a gift in learning the steps to the dance. You can still delight with God even if you mess up once in awhile. Wisdom is delighting in us and dancing alongside us, so relax, let God lead, laugh at life, and enjoy the beauty it holds.

Seeking wisdom is about learning how to delight in God's ways. One step may just be learning to dance with the Spirit.

Wisdom calls out to us today.

*Sermon delivered by Rev. Bruce Dickson at Dublin Street United Church (on Location), Guelph, ON Sunday, June 12, 2022. For personal use or study purposes only.*