

Highfield Rd Uniting Church

Trinity - Wisdom in Mystery

Proverbs 8:1 - 5, 22 - 31



Do you hear Lady Wisdom calling?
Can you hear Madam Insight raising her voice?
The Message

There is an old saying, "How much wisdom have we lost in intelligence, and how much intelligence have we lost in information?" Intelligence and information, or we might say scholarship, tells us that Hebrew, like Greek and German and a lot of other languages, has gendered words. That doesn't mean the thing being described actually has gender, it is merely a grammatical device. When the writer of Proverbs applies feminine pronouns to wisdom, that's not a description of wisdom as a female person, it is simply a convention that wisdom is a feminine noun. But Wisdom, who stands at every crossroad and gate replies, "Do you not affirm that humans are made

in the image of God, male and female? Why then do you reject the idea that wisdom is feminine?"

We culturally associate wisdom with age and talk about the 'wise men' and the sages, and picture wisdom as an old man, the bearded guru at the top of the mountain. What a delight, on a day when we are pointed to the persons of the Trinity, to be confronted by Lady Wisdom, joyously dancing with God at the creation of the world! Lady Wisdom, Sophia in Greek, who is not the reward of a long struggle up a mountain of learning, but who stands at every crossroad and gate and entrance, calling for attention. Lady Wisdom, Madam Insight, the source of creativity and the way of righteousness and justice.

In the early 2000s there two films depicting God interacting with people; Bruce Almighty and Evan Almighty. Two films that contain some excellent material for theology by the way. Both movies starred Morgan Freeman as God, and both were criticised by parts of the US church for that choice. Not because he was African American, although that may have been an underlying issue, but because God is God, and a human cannot be God.

The self-published Canadian novel The Shack, which went on to be a 1 million seller, tells of a man, deep in grief, being invited into a conversation with God, created controversy by picturing God as three humans, separate and yet connected in thoughts and insights - an Indigenous father, a Jewish son, and a female spirit - Sophia. A grand parable of encountering the complexity, and particularly the grace, of God as a way through grief.

These fictional pictures and imaginings of God may seem like anthropomorphism and wishful thinking, but are they so different to the bold claim at the centre of our faith, that in some way God came to us in Jesus - a human, Jewish man? We talk in theology of God as persons, and although such talk goes to great lengths to say that divine persons are not the same as human persons, where is the problem in imagining Father, Son, and Spirit as persons? In the face of the mystery of how God can be beyond us, and yet beside us, and yet within us, what else can we do than engage our imaginations and join in the creative, joyous dance of the Spirit? And in the light of the creation story, why not allow our imaginations to wander in fields of race and gender?

We are very familiar and gripped by the opening line of Genesis - "in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth", but do we grasp the complexity of that first chapter? Even the strictly monotheistic Jewish priests who wrote those words had to concede that it was not a solo effort; God creates through Word and Spirit. A co-creation that is so wonderfully celebrated in the words of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8. A co-creation that we also find in the first chapter of John's Gospel - "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things came into being through him." Does that mean that Proverbs is wrong in associating the co-creator with the feminine Wisdom - Sophia - and it is actually the masculine Word - Jesus - who is the co-creator of the heavens and the earth? Or are we comfortable enough with the intertwining, dancing persons of the Trinity that such playfulness in language and concepts is quite acceptable? Wisdom is about creation and imagination and metaphors and stories, and it is through Wisdom that we have an entry into the mystery of the Trinity rather than the cold logic of intelligence and information.

To twist Winston Churchill's quote, "The Trinity is the worst description of God, except for all the others." The cold, hard approach of intelligence and reason reacts against the actions of the divine in the world, and so has a problem with a divine Jesus or an involved Father God, and claims that the Bible has nothing to say about a Trinity, leaving us with God in heaven and a prophet Jesus teaching the way of love with the aid of a 'feeling' that we are not alone. But it also has a problem with heaven as being an ancient concept, and so we are left with either God everywhere or God outside of reality. Against that, we have the warmth of wisdom calling us to imagine a unified Godhead that we might look to as three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, but also imagine as Creator, Saviour, and Sustainer in which all three persons share in those three attributes. Almighty God supported by Word and Wisdom, Word, enriched by Almighty God and Wisdom, and Wisdom, enlightened by Word and the Almighty God. If Jesus is not God, then how are we reconciled to God? If God is not involved in the world, then who is Jesus? If the Spirit is not God within, then how are we energised for the work of reconciliation? The Trinity is the worst description of God, except for all the others. The Trinity reimagined beyond a simple doctrine as the great, spinning, dancing interplay of God in which love is central and interwoven and mutually expressed. Wisdom looks beyond intellect because it engages emotion and imagination and interacts with experience and community, because God is the divine community.

The way into the Trinity is not through logical thought or combing through the Bible for proof texts, or simply accepting a doctrine of the church. The way into the mystery and complexity and grand beauty of God as One and yet Three, Three and yet One, is through Wisdom. Lady Wisdom, the joyous, laughing, dancing, co-worker of God who invites us into imagination and creation and the delightful work of playing with concepts and metaphors and persons. Join the dance of love and don't let intelligence or information get in the way of Lady Wisdom, who beckons us at every crossroad, gate, and entrance.