

Wisdom cries out **in the street;**
in the squares she raises her voice.
At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks...
(Proverbs 1:20-21)

Wisdom cries out in the street...in the public square...at the busy intersections...at the entrance to the city. She speaks...

As Christians we look to Jesus for truth—and we look especially to the Bible and the Sacraments to show us the way to Jesus. Yet, paradoxically it seems, today’s Old Testament reading from Proverbs points us to the streets in our search for wisdom. God’s is at work *in the world*, the sage says. Wisdom is calling out. You just have to learn how and where to look.

I took this text with me to the Greendale Y on Tuesday afternoon—literally and metaphorically. Usually when I head to the Higgins Center I take something to read and I try to retreat into my own private meditations and block out the world around me. But I went on that day with my eyes and ears open, wondering where Wisdom might be calling out. “*Where is God here, now, in this place?*” I wondered.

I took note of the three silent television screens: Oprah was doing something with a fashion consultant who was trying to help women find the right jeans for their body type. CNN was reviewing the rhetoric and political posturing over the remembrances of 9/11. I’m not exactly sure what was on ESPN. The radio was playing The Cars, who were belting out, “I guess you’re just what I needed...”

Now you might say that I was eavesdropping—but I prefer to call it sermon preparation. Two women were talking on the elliptical machine about the divorce one of them was going through. She told her friend that she could just feel the whole thing getting out of control—that she and her husband were now fighting over 401-Ks and all the rest. I’m sure she’s felt an array of emotions as anyone I’ve ever known who has gone down that road has felt. But what she told her friend was this: “I just feel in a daze.” I admired her candor. Even more, I admired her friend who was somehow managing to workout *and still* hear her friend to speech.

There were two men over by the nautilus equipment; ironically they, too, were talking about 401-Ks. I heard one of them saying, “I’m 62..., so I need to start thinking about the next chapter of my life.”

Now my streets are suburban streets—easy to disparage, I suppose. The conversations I heard could just as easily have taken place on the soccer field or the parking lot at the Big Y. And yet, the sages, tell us, Wisdom is there, calling to us.

In fact the scholars remind us that this language of city streets and gates is cosmic language. It is meant to suggest to us that the divine life is built into the fabric of the universe. That if we want to find God we can't just look at the pages of a book or inside of the Church or underneath the bread and the wine. We need to tend to our lives—our sacred stories—to those moments when we stand in the kitchen talking with a teenager, those moments at work or at school when we face joys and struggles—those moments that if we aren't careful slip by without us recognizing how precious they are.

I love to listen to Garrison Keillor, partly I think because his stories come from small town streets and cafes that remind me of the small town where I grew up. He is an attentive student of people's lives, and his stories make me laugh (and sometimes even cry) because they ring so true. There's a story he tells about Jimmy Beiler—a teenager who wants to go see a band called "Mammoth" in concert and so he goes and camps out on the streets of St. Paul overnight to get tickets.

Meanwhile, though, his mother is lying in bed and reading "Home and Hearth magazine"—about the evils of rock music and especially of a band called "Mammoth." And when the story ends the next morning and Jimmy is upstairs sleeping, and the tickets are on the kitchen table, his mother wonders whether or not a good, loving, mother ought not to rip up those tickets in order to save her boy.

But Keillor knows enough to stop there—to leave the ending open, to leave us hanging and wondering. What would Wisdom have a mother do in such a predicament? That's the hard part of course: we can listen for Wisdom but it's discerning which voice is Wisdom and which is Folly that's the really hard part.

I have lived in the city but I don't pretend to know very much about city streets, other than to visit. But it seems to me that whether or not we enjoy rap music it tells the hard truth of at least part of what Wisdom cries out about on city streets. I found myself listening to a British rap group (interestingly enough called, "The Streets.") They have a song about grief—about the loss of the poet's father. It's called "Never Went to Church" and part of it goes like this:

We never went to church
Just get on with work and sometimes
Things'll hurt
But it's hit me since you left us
And it so hard not to search.

And then I listened to a song by Outcast, called simply "Church." (It was actually one of the few songs I could quote in Church.) Anyway, it begins this way:

Man have you ever really wondered/ Like why we here?
What the meaning of all this?

Now I'm not 100% sure of where I want to go with all of this. But I guess that the older I get, the more tired I am of theologies and spiritualities that simply dismiss the world—*God's world*—out

of hand. I'm tired of spiritualities that float six feet above the world but never touch real people's lives. My faith in Jesus Christ is grounded in the same theology the sages give us in Proverbs 1: that God with us means that we need to tend to the word on the street. That if the words we say here have no bearing on our lives Monday to Friday then they are of little use to us.

Wisdom speaks—God speaks—in and through our lives. That is why our stories are so incredibly sacred. Even the wounded parts—the parts we are sometimes afraid to bring to Church—the angry parts or the morbid parts or the frightened parts of us. God is there, too—especially there. Wisdom speaks in the streets, in our homes, through our lives—not because we are holier than thou but because we are created in the image of God and if you want to see the face of God you have to look for it in the world God has made. Christ is alive—and as Brian Wren's great Easter hymn puts it:

Not enthroned above, remotely high,
untouched, unmoved by human pains—
but *daily in the midst of life*,
our Savior, with the Father reigns.

Discerning what exactly Wisdom is saying in the midst of the cacophony of voices of our lives is not easy. But as I reflect even on that time in the Y—I hear Wisdom in all of it. People struggling with their own body images—with how they look in a pair of jeans. That can be trivial and superficial, to be sure; but Wisdom is also about figuring out how to be embodied—how to carry this treasure around in these earthen vessels—and to care for our bodies in ways that lead to life. We are still, as a nation, trying to sort through the meaning of 9/11. But—and this is very personal, I realize and may not express your experience—I was really glad in that time that the televisions at the Y were on mute—and I had no desire to plug an earpiece in to hear what the talking heads were saying. (How much better to listen to The Cars singing, “you're just what I needed!") Because quite frankly I think they have forgotten the word that was on the streets of New York City on September 11, 2001—before the partisan posturing began and we were just Americans—just scared, just neighbors, just together in our grief. We need, I think, to listen to the voice of Wisdom that calls us back to being one nation again.

When we grieve we need above all else to try to make sense of it all—even if it doesn't make any sense. Even when like that woman on the elliptical machine, divorce or some other loss leaves us feeling “in a daze” we need to find the words—we need a friend to help us navigate our way. Or when we grieve the death of someone close to us—even if we never before went to church—we may find a tug for meaning—a tug for something more—a yearning for community.

As we navigate the seasons of our lives—whether we are raising teenagers or looking toward retirement—it is simply human to need to figure it out with a friend. We need each other. I think that if you read Proverbs that's the insight that hits you again and again. It isn't rocket science. We need one other to give life meaning. We need to open ourselves up to one another when we are most scared—and when we do, we discover that God is present. We experience the love of God and it's palpable and real.

It's one thing to say that Jesus is the answer. That's the easy part. The hard part is that the Church is called to figure out what the questions are—and how Jesus is real in the midst of life's struggles. At our best, the Episcopal Church gets it that it is the questions that matter and that our task is not to offer easy answers so much as it is to create a safe space for people to wonder, and search, and explore. It'll be messy—that kind of Church. But I think it is authentic, and real, and life giving.

Wisdom cries out all around us. It's not always easy to figure out what she is saying. But the big question is this: are we paying attention?

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