

DON'T NEGLECT IT!

Proverbs 8:1-35

Intro

Here is the premise that I am starting out from in regard to this passage: the movement of the Spirit of God in the world is something that most people do not understand, let alone are comfortable with. We like the tangible. And when it comes to understanding how the Divine Trinity works, the tangible shows up in what we consider the first two persons.

God the Father we are able to understand as God the Creator. Well, we are able to see, feel, smell, and generally experience creation. We can, at some level, understand that identity of God.

God the Son, we have come to know as God the Redeemer. Jesus is God made flesh and through the willing sacrifice of God made flesh, humanity now has the opportunity to be redeemed from the sin, those acts of commission and omission that separate us from the Almighty and from one another. If we have been led to a Christian faith, we are able to understand that identity of God.

Then there's the whole God the Spirit, aka God the sustainer identity. This is where understanding and appreciation begin to slip away, again, I believe, because the tangible elements of the Holy Spirit can be explained away, by nature, science, or happenstance.

There are a few different ways that God's Spirit is understood in the midst of scripture. One is as the breath, or as said in Hebrew, ruach, of God. The kids in the confirmation class normally love that one because in order to articulate the word correctly, you'll need more phlegm.

The other way is as the wisdom of God.

In both cases, the tangible elements of this identity of God seem rather difficult to come by, but this does not make the effect of God's presence in our lives any less real.

In this morning's passage, God's breath is moving throughout the world as wisdom and she is articulating the truth that needed to be heard so long ago, and still needs to be heard today: follow me and you will be blessed. And then conversely: go your own way and you will reap the empty bounty of the world's fortune. The scripture reads this way.

Proverbs 8:1-35

8 Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? ² On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; ³ beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: ⁴ "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. ⁵ O simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it. ⁶ Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; ⁷ for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. ⁸ All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. ⁹ They are all straight to one who understands and right to those who find knowledge. ¹⁰ Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; ¹¹ for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. ¹² I, wisdom, live with prudence, ¹³ and I attain knowledge and discretion. ¹³ The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I

hate. ¹⁴ I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength. ¹⁵ By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; ¹⁶ by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly. ¹⁷ I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. ¹⁸ Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. ¹⁹ My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver. ²⁰ I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, ²¹ endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

²² The LORD created me at the beginning^[b] of his work,^[c] the first of his acts of long ago. ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth— ²⁶ when he had not yet made earth and fields,^[d] or the world's first bits of soil. ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, ²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker;^[e] and I was daily his^[f] delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. ³² "And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. ³³ Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. ³⁴ Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. ³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD;

"Don't Neglect It!"

Pentecost has always been one of those Christian celebrations that, at least in the protestant churches that I grew up around, really never had an identity. I knew that it was there, sort of. But things like Music Appreciation Sunday and Youth Sunday always seemed to be of greater importance.

I've tried to lean against that trend during my years as a pastor, but nothing really seemed to be able to speak to people the way that the Spirit is credited with being able to speak through the Apostles on that first Pentecost Sunday.

I totally appreciate the fact that it is 'hard to understand' what it means when we are told that Spirit of God is speaking and moving in our world and in our lives, leading us, just like our passage is able to articulate to us this morning. And it is.

But there are a whole lot of forces out there in the midst of the world that are speaking...quite loudly. And the reality is, that if we don't make an active step toward something, then we have made a passive step toward whatever is pulling the strongest at that particular point.

The voice of the Spirit of God, which today is specifically identified as Wisdom, is calling to us to hear the instruction that is being offered; to be wise and not neglect it. But will we?

Right now is a season of the year where speeches are being made all around the country to graduates and their families calling for them to listen to all sorts of voices. 'Don't let opportunities pass you by', 'these are the best days of your life', and 'don't forget to contribute generously to the institution that has meant so much to you'.

Yeah, there are all sorts of voices that are out there.

But are any of those calls the voice of God's Spirit calling for us to be good stewards of the world? Calling for us to care for each other the way that God first cared for us? Calling for us to be a servant, not because there is some law that says that we must put in so many hours of 'community service' but because we have been led by a voice that reminds us that this faith that we have blessed with, when put into action, empowers those who feel that they are last to begin to understand that in God's eyes, they are a precious and absolutely essential guest in God's presence.

The wisdom of the world is able to be heard all over the place. They say things like 'repent or perish' (from the Westboro Baptist Church – which is not a church: it's a family cult), 'We can handle good news. We can handle bad news. We just can't handle no news.' (which is the sentiment of a pastor in the Reformed Church as to why he was in favor of changing the rules of order as to whether or not the denomination continues or not), 'Coexist' (which too often gets interpreted as 'stay quiet so you don't offend'), or 'If God exists then why do bad things happen to good people and why do the bad people have so much good happen to them?' It says 'take care of yourself', 'no one is more important than you', and 'you deserve it...even if you don't need it.'

The wisdom of the world is on display all the time, and there are way too many times when we listen to those declarations and buy into them hook, line, and sinker.

But as people of faith, we have been led to know that true wisdom is not of man: true wisdom is of God.

Are we listening to the voice of God through the movement of the Spirit as it calls out to us?

So, I need to talk about 'a something' that happened at the denominational meeting this past week. As we have talked about before, our denomination, the Reformed Church in America, is one year away from receiving a recommendation from an advisory committee that will recommend whether the church remain as it is, radically restructure, or separate in an orderly way. The reason that we are having these conversations revolves around the myriad of LGBTQ+ issues regarding inclusion or exclusion, depending on where you stand on the issue.

That recommendation will come next year and if it is affirmed at that 2020 denominational meeting, it would then need to be approved by 2/3rds of the regional church bodies (we call them Classes) before being affirmed at the following denominational meeting in 2021.

It may sound laborious, but it is how we have been led by God to be in relationship with one another.

An interesting thing happened: folks who feel that the recommendation will be to dissolve, put a proposal before the meeting that we do away with the whole 2/3rd's thing in favor of a simple majority so that whatever recommendation is given, it will only need 51% of the regional church bodies to move on toward approval.

The following statement has become one of the go to explanations for why this proposal is appropriate: 'There are two values at work here, both that are valuable. One is a large group of people that like to live in the tension. ... But there's also a very large group of us who desire clarity. And clarity is a powerful thing. The way at least that I work, and I know a lot of people in my church and in my classis work is: We can handle good news. We can handle bad news. We just can't handle no news.'

Two things: did you notice the us and them that was created? Does that sound like the wisdom of God to you?

And then secondly, when did denominational clarity become a more important voice than 'love your neighbor as God first loved you'?

There are two types of wisdom that are able to be observed.

As we have talked about before, I know that there are a variety of perspectives that reside within these walls in regard to just about every issue, let alone the conversations about the LGBTQ+ community. Regardless of what we may understand or believe, it all needs to flow through the filter of love your neighbor as God first loved you. If it does not, then it is not of God.

And guess what? That can happen in times of clarity and anything but.

We must not neglect the wisdom, the real God breathed wisdom, that is, from my perspective, so clearly being articulated.

And while that certainly pertains to what I just talked about, it absolutely is connected to all of those things that are leaning on you in your life right now. What is leaning on you? I mean really leaning in on you? Take that intentional step of going to God in prayer and asking, fervently, to hear, see, and feel how God is blowing into that situation.

Yes, that relates to the denomination but how much more does that passion of God able to be felt in our individual lives? You are the sons and daughters of the living God and by falling before His throne we intentionally open ourselves to how the wisdom of God is breathing into our existence. Step toward God and become that much more open to being led by true wisdom.

My prayer, as we gather here on this Sunday is that we listen to the wisdom, the real and true wisdom that is being articulated.

It's there and it's clear...if we are willing to see it.

Listen for the wisdom of God; hear what it is saying; then step forward knowing that you will be blessed in ways too numerous to count.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy Lord, through Your Spirit You are still speaking, reminding us of who You are and who we are in You. Help us to hear these truths and not neglect them for as we follow You, Your blessings will flow. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.