

Discerning Wisdom's Voice in the Clamour of Empire & Marketplace
[Proverbs 1](#) & [Mark 8](#) | Knox-Metropolitan United Church
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Will you join me, in pondering the possibilities, these stories open up for us today?

Perhaps not seeking a final word

Or an exact place where we might live these out

But letting our questions like Where does this speak to me, to us today

Beget new questions...as we reflect and ponder together...

The story we heard from the Gospel of Mark is often framed as the moment in which Peter 'got it'.

When he was able, amidst of all the possible understandings of Jesus, to give the theologically correct answer to the question

Who do you say that I am?

Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.'

Of course, then Peter gets it wrong when he is unable to accept what Jesus is teaching about suffering

This episode also shows up in the Book of Matthew

But there it is a bit more embellished

When Peter makes his declaration about Jesus, he is lauded for it

'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven

But I think that these framings support and become self-fulfilling when our expectations of Scripture, of Holy Text, is to give us the right answers.

Right answers are static things

One reaches orthodoxy and then one stakes out ground

And defends it

Against wrong thinking and conflicting interpretations

Disbelief and Doubt

This framework is increasingly been questioned as interconnected

With doctrines of dominance, Superiority, Entitlement

Frankly, Empire.

Which is deeply ironic because this text itself, offers us a hint of a different possibility

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?'

Caesarea Philippi

A region whose name in the Gospels echoes the title of the Roman Emperor and Philip the Tetrach, son of Herod the Great (the one from the Christmas stories, the one who orders the murder of the children of Judea after Jesus' birth out of fear that his political power might come into question).

Caesarea Philippi

Having named the city in honour of the Emperor, Philip is said to have minted coins with the face of the Emperor stamped upon them, an act that would be considered scandalous, treacherous and heretical by the people.

To give such recognition to the emperor of the foreign armies who devastated their land and to remind the people of his ongoing power

A reminder of their ongoing suffering

It was in that very city during the Jewish Roman War of 67 CE that Vespasian rested his army before advancing north to crush the Galilean resistance. All of that happens after the time of the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth but many scholars place the authorship of the book of Mark during this very historical moment.

Yesterday, marked 20 years since the events of September 11, 2001, and certainly there is little American literature, art, or other writing from that moment and since in which the resonance of those events are not felt when the place New York City is named.

Caesarea Philippi and other places are doing the same thing for the people of Galilee...

Mark's audience.

It is interesting that the frames of the Revised Common Lectionary, our schedule of readings, chose to pair this episode, steeped in a setting of Empire, along with the selection from the Hebrew Scriptures...an ode to Wisdom...to Lady Sophia.

*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:*

On our Facebook Page, we have shared a rendering of this passage with powerful visuals which was created by the Rev. Bri-anne Swann of Resistance Church, a ministry of Jubilee United Church in Toronto.

If you've not seen it, it is very worth your while.

<https://fb.watch/7ZKisSJHfs/>

In our cultural context, sometimes wisdom, while admirable, is reduced to pithy proverbs or good advice, and so we do well to seek to grasp the depth of the understanding of this term from the Hebrew Sacred text.

Wisdom is often rendered as Holy Sophia and it is she who cries out

The Hebrew tradition of Wisdom Literature very notably attributes wisdom personhood – to be precise, a feminine personhood.

*For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;*

*For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,*

*Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;*

In the Hebrew Wisdom Tradition, she is the creative force by which all things came into being, and it is she who lead the Hebrew people to safety from slavery.

That is who is crying at the gates

In the market places

On the street corners

She beckons her hearers to move from the economics of division to the dance of connection

From apathy to accountability

I believe that we can read these two passages against and through one another as invitation

To enter into a practice of discernment

Not to find the right answer out of many possibilities

But to connect our own deepest calling

To the calling of the world around us

So I wonder

If we were to pause here

And invite you to turn to someone sitting nearby

Or to pause the Live Stream and join a Zoom Breakout Room

And ponder together

Where is the call of wisdom to you today?

What is beckoning for your attention?

From within your emotions and thoughts

From the blessings and challenges of your day to day?

From what you see in the world around you?

Jesus' followers, Mark's readers, and the Hebrew Community of the Wisdom books found themselves in complicated times

Empire and Exile

Prophetic voices calling them to re-embrace Shalom and Sabbath

What do we hear when we listen together?

What stirs our longing

What breaks our hearts

Wisdom, she stands at the gates and calls out

God is still speaking for we are not alone...