

Edina Morningside Community Church
United Church of Christ
Sunday, May 22, 2016
Rev. Howard K. Bell
At the Crossroads

Today's lectionary invites us to celebrate Trinity Sunday. This is the only time in the lectionary where the focus is on a doctrinal concept - the Trinity - rather than on a concept found in scripture or a biblical story. The trinity is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. Therefore, there is no one text that could be used to specifically focus on the Trinity. The formal commemoration of the doctrine of the Trinity was established only in the fourteenth century. Commentator, David G. Trickett says, *"it simply may have been time, by the fourteenth century, formally to call attention to a central Christian conviction: though we experience God in a variety of ways (perhaps even more than three!), the unity and coherence of God's full reality trumps our respective attachments to one or another of the ways we experience God."*¹Therefore, I believe it is important to recognize that the purpose of the Trinity is not to emphasize the differences in the three elements, but to emphasize our unity with God.

Last week we focused on one aspect of the Trinity – that is the Holy Spirit - as revealed to us on Pentecost Sunday as tongues of fire. This week we are continuing to focus on the Holy Spirit as we are introduced to Wisdom.

Introduced to, may be an understatement. Our text says: *"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."* It seems as though you could not miss her. Hear these same verses from Eugene Peterson's adaptation - The Message: *"She's taken her stand at First and Main, at the busiest intersection. Right in the city square where the traffic is thickest, she shouts, "You—I'm talking to all of you, everyone out here."* Peterson's adaptation of the text provides us with an emphasis on the universality of Wisdom's message.

Commentator, Jeff Paschal, provides us with a contemporary interpretation of this text. It goes like this: *"I was out shopping yesterday, and whom did I run into? Wisdom. Yeah, there she was. She called me over and we began talking, Wisdom and I. Then, I went down to the courthouse, and there she was again, making a plea for justice in some dingy courtroom where somebody had been unjustly accused. After that, I dropped by the school, and she had gotten there before me, calling for students and teachers alike always to seek truth. Then I went for a walk in the woods, moving along the trail in quiet meditation. Wisdom snuck up on me and said, "Now that we are alone, I have something I want to share with you, a present I want you to enjoy. You know, I have been around a long time, really before the beginning of time. I have been whirling and dancing with God all along. I am God's delight, laughing and playing. I want you to know the lightness of spirit and gladness that come when you welcome me. Will you set aside those thoughts, words, and*

¹ http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_may_22_2016

*deeds that make life heavy and sad for you and others? Will you come and laugh and play with me? Will you come and dance with me? Will you?"*²

Commentator, Kathryn M. Matthews, says: *"In our reflections, however, it's important to engage Lady Wisdom first as a powerful Old Testament figure, able to stand there, on the heights, and in the crossroads, on her own two feet. We recall that the Hebrew Scriptures were the only "Bible" that Jesus and the first Christians read..."*³ Matthews calls our attention to a repeated refrain in the Book of Proverbs. That refrain is that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and the starting point for right living. I remember discussing this refrain with our Kris Kulevsky, our confirmation co-leader and with the confirmands. We asked ourselves, "Does God require us to be fearful of God?"

Commentator Matthews gives us one way of understanding this reference to the "fear of God". She says: *This phrase refers not to cowering anxiety about God but to an appropriate and deep reverence, and awe, before the One who made us and is actually the source of all true wisdom.*

*Our text this week, then, introduces the source of this wisdom, Lady Wisdom, who stands right in the most public of places – at the crossroads, at the city gate, in the doorways – and not in some secluded place where secret teachings are shared with a select few. No, this teaching is clearly for everyone, for her cry "is to all that live" (v. 4), and she stands not on a lonely mountaintop but right in the middle of the busiest part of town and speaks to the crowds as they go about their business.*⁴ Thus reverence and awe of God – not cowering anxiety are manifestations of true wisdom.

Practicing wisdom does not have to be all serious work. In today's text Wisdom claims: "I was brought forth— when God had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil." The same verb that was translated as "brought forth" can be translated, as "whirl, dance, or writhe." I love this image that suggests to us that we can whirl, dance and write with God.

Douglas M. Donley wrote a commentary for today's text. He is also the Lead Minister at University Baptist Church, here in Minneapolis. He says, "We all have human wisdom. Call it intuition, call it life experience—we all have wisdom. Wisdom often exists beneath our consciousness. In a secular sense, wisdom is the sum of our experiences, the perspectives and insights that are part of our core being.

Why can't this form of wisdom be seen as an aspect of God's presence in our lives? As we are innately wise, so are we innately connected with God"...

² Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16).

³ http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_may_22_2016

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I love that understanding of wisdom. Wisdom is innate in us. We have to learn to trust ourselves in order to grow in wisdom. We need to be deeply connected to God – in reverence and awe – in order to grow in wisdom. How else might we grow in wisdom?

Author, Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book, An Altar in the World says: “*Wisdom is not gained by knowing what is right.*

*Wisdom is gained by practicing what is right, and noticing what happens when that practice succeeds and when it fails.”*⁵ So we might say that wisdom is about paying attention – about noticing.

What are the crossroads for your lives today? Where do you need more wisdom in your work, in your family life, in your spiritual lives? Wisdom is needed by our Search Committee as they seek God’s will in choosing the new settled pastor. Wisdom is needed within each of us as we end our Interim Ministry Time. Wisdom is needed for this community as you will seek to welcome, embrace, partner with, challenge and grow together with the new settled pastor. Let us learn to stand with Lady Wisdom at the crossroads of our lives. May we dance with Wisdom today and throughout our lives. Amen.

⁵ https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/71455.Barbara_Brown_Taylor