

## **Sunday 7 November, 2021**

*Sermon given by the Revd Canon Christopher Carolane at St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne on Sunday November 7, for Creation Tide and Baptism Freya Cousins*

**Readings:** Prov 8.1-4, 22-31; Ps 95; Heb. 4.1-11; John 6.1-15

Most scholars agree that the majority of the Book of Proverbs, including the passage we read today as our first reading, was written by King Solomon in about 700BC.

The prologue tells us that the book is

**2**        *“For learning about wisdom and instruction,  
              for understanding words of insight, “(Prov. 1:2)*

Finding “Wisdom” is its major purpose.

What is “wisdom”?

One dictionary I consulted, defines wisdom as “the ability to use your knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgments”.<sup>1</sup>

In chapters 7, 8 and 9 of Proverbs, Solomon uses personification as a literary device to describe foolishness, in the person of “Lady Folly” and wisdom, in the person of “Lady Wisdom”.

Lady Folly is a harlot, wily of heart, loud and wayward, trying to lure people into her clutches. Seductive and a smooth talker, she tries to lure them into the secret places of

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge online dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wisdom> accessed 5/11/21

sin and lust. (Prov. 7:10 – 23). To follow her is to follow the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death (Prov. 7:27).

Wisdom on the other hand is personified as “Lady Wisdom” who calls the people to

- learn prudence
- acquire intelligence

because what comes from her mouth is truthful and noble, righteous, and wise. (Prov. 8:4-8). We read that Lady Wisdom loves those who love her. Those who diligently seek her, find her (Prov. 8:17). Her fruit is better than gold, even fine gold. (Prov. 8:19). She walks in the way of righteousness and justice.

So, these two - Folly and Wisdom - stand in opposition and in stark contrast to each other. One leads to death. The other leads to righteous, prudent intelligence.

Now how is this significant for us in this Creation tide season? Let me explain.

Solomon declares that God created wisdom at the beginning of God’s work (Prov. 8:22 ff.). Solomon puts on the lips of Lady Wisdom these words:

*“Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.”*

So, before God’s creative work which is described for us in Genesis 1 – 3, wisdom was already present. Indeed, in verse 30 of Proverbs 8 we read (Lady Wisdom is speaking):

*“... then I was beside God, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, <sup>31</sup> rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”*

God used wisdom when he created the world. His creation was very good, the inhabited world and the human race brought delight and joy to Lady Wisdom. Surely, it behoves us to seek her as we struggle with the mess we have made of God’s perfect creation. Sadly, humanity has been seduced by Lady Folly.

We read in the first letter to Timothy that “... *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ...* “. (1 Tim. 6.10)

I don't think it is very hard to demonstrate that the seduction of Lady Folly centres on the love of and lust for money in the illusion that money brings happiness and enjoyment. We have pursued wealth to our own detriment and to the detriment of the planet, causing increasing destruction of the beautiful universe that God, with wisdom, created. “**Things**” have become more important than the fear and worship of the Lord. The true path to wisdom has been overshadowed by greed and as a result creation groans more than ever.

We suffer as individuals, we suffer as a nation and the whole world suffers internationally, as the rich seek to become richer at the expense of the poor and marginalised. In the pursuit of money, the world and its resources have been ravaged.

If ever we need **God's wisdom** in dealing with the challenges before us of global warming, air, ground and water pollution, and the misuse of food resources, we need it now. As we struggle with how to rectify biodiversity loss, deforestation, increasing acidity of oceans, melting of our ice caps and sea level rise, **we need God's wisdom!**

In many places, the Scripture proclaims that the fear (or reverence) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10; Sir. 1:14).

Our Psalm today beckons us to come to the Lord to worship him.

*O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! (Ps. 95: 1 – 2)*

Why should we do this? The psalmist tells us in the next verses:

*<sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. <sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. <sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.*

**Worship** should be our response to our loving, creator God in whose **wisdom** the world and everything in it was made perfectly, and for our delight. It is the only response that should be made in the light of God's wonderful provisions for us.

But note carefully that our Psalm warns us **not to harden our hearts** (verse 8) as the ancient people of Israel did at Massah. They thought they knew better than Moses (and thus God). They argued with Moses and complained that God wasn't caring for them, even though God was. There seemed to be no water for them to drink and they complained bitterly, but as God had done for them from day one of their wilderness journey, God miraculously provided water for them. There was more than enough to supply their needs. When God created the earth and all that is in it, he did the same, there were enough resources to supply the needs of the whole planet without causing it harm.

However, the arrogance and lack of faith of the ancient people in the wilderness led to God's judgement on them and so they missed out on entering the promised land – God's rest.

The Psalmist warns *us* – **don't you be like those people! Don't harden your hearts or else you, too will miss out on God's promises. We need to follow God's wisdom, not our own foolish ways.** The warning is reiterated in the first verses of our epistle reading from Hebrews 4. We need to wake up to ourselves and turn to God, bowing in worship before him as we seek his **wisdom** to live and act correctly as we seek to find the best way - to make good decisions and judgments which are at the heart of wisdom - to save the planet from the mess we have made.

The matter is urgent. Do it **today**, the psalmist writes, or we too will miss out on God's blessings for us.

God blessed humanity with his wonderful creation but humanity has been seduced by the lust for money and wealth and so we have destroyed so much of God's creation and poisoned it by misusing our resources and with our waste.

**We need God's wisdom to overcome the mess we find ourselves in.**

It is not too late, but we need to turn in worship and fear of the creator who made us. But seeking and following God's wisdom requires us to act! We cannot be passive, waiting for some mythical magical wand to be waved to change what is wrong. We need to fight for what is **right with God's wisdom, justice, and righteousness.**

St Paul, writing to the Corinthians, reminded them that Christ is the power of God and the **wisdom of God.** (1Cor. 1:24) And a little later he says, "(God) is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us **wisdom from God,** and righteousness and sanctification and redemption..." (1 Cor 1:30).

As we seek to right the wrongs that have been done to God's creation by us and others, we need to confess the sin that has caused it, and we need to seek God's wisdom today, ensuring that we are not seduced away from his righteousness anymore.

In the words of that well known hymn, we need to fight the **good** fight with all our might because it is Christ who is our strength and right. Lay hold on *life*, (not on money or wealth) and it shall be your joy and crown eternally.

How do we do that? The hymn goes on to tell us. We need to:

Run the straight race through God's good grace,  
Lift up your eyes and seek **his face**,  
*Life with its way before us lies,*  
*Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.*

Brothers and sisters, as we struggle in the fight to put right the wrongs against creation, let us firmly and steadfastly fear the Lord as we seek in Christ, God's wisdom to act justly, righteously and with care for the good of all.

Amen