

The Holy Trinity
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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“Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?” This is the question that begins today’s poetic excerpt from Proverbs. And, if you’re anything like me, you probably haven’t spent too much time in Proverbs. The book is part of the Hebrew Scriptures, and its purpose is to teach the reader how to embody wisdom and avoid folly. That is, to move away from ignorance, arrogance, and stupidity, and to move toward understanding, knowledge, and good sense.¹ What fascinates me about today’s passage is that in that male-centric society, wisdom is personified as a woman. So, I wonder: what does this strong, feminine image mean for a patriarchal religion? How does Christianity interact with Woman Wisdom? And, what does it have to do with the Trinity? These are some of the questions we have before us today.

Some scholars would argue that Woman Wisdom, along with the direct opposites of her character found in the other women of Proverbs—namely, Woman Folly (chapter 9), Woman Stranger (chapter 2), and the adulteress—are all remnants of a goddess once worshipped by the Israelites. Others call Woman Wisdom an extension of God’s attributes that took on their own form. Still, some have had the challenge of explaining how and why Woman Wisdom entered the Christian Scriptures in the Gospel of John with a gender change to the masculine term “Logos”.² So, what does this all mean for us, and does it even matter?

¹ Harper Collins Study Bible’s introduction to “Proverbs.”

² <http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/WebOTcomments/OrdinaryC/TrinityProv8.html>

To the early church, these questions mattered a lot. For, if Woman Wisdom in Proverbs is the same as the masculine Logos in John's Gospel, then, that would mean that Woman Wisdom is another way to understand the person of Jesus. Which, for those of us who are gender-aware, the idea that Jesus's essence has both feminine and masculine qualities can be quite refreshing. However, if Wisdom and Logos are both terms we ascribe to Jesus, then today's reading from Proverbs can become problematic.

You see, in verse 22 from today's reading we heard that the LORD (literally, Yahweh, or transliterated from Hebrew as: YHWH) *created* wisdom first. But, this presented a challenge to the unifying creed that was the product of Emperor Constantine's desire to get the Christians streamlined for the sake of unifying his empire. In this creed, which we call the Nicene Creed, there is this deeply debated phrase called the Filioque, which, from Latin, is translated as "and the Son." The presence of that phrase in the Nicene Creed, along with how it's translated and understood, has enormous implications for our understanding of the Trinity. Now, this phrase comes up in that last part of that creed, which goes: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father ((and the Son))." Some people say the Nicene Creed with "and the Son" and others don't.

Ok, so I'm pretty sure I've lost some of you now. So, what does all this mean? Well, here's the thing, if "Woman Wisdom" in Proverbs is synonymous with "Logos" in John and both are synonymous with Jesus. And, if the Holy Spirit only proceeds from the Father and not from the Son, then a lot of questions come up, like, was Jesus fully God? How does the Trinity work? Is there really one God with three "persons" known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? It may seem like an odd debate, but this all contributed to the great Christian schism in 1054 where the Eastern and

Western churches parted ways. And, I wonder, is going to battle over something like this worth it? Is it worth dividing the church, literally killing people, tormenting and demonizing others over something that in the end we don't have a clear answer on?

When we read John 5 and hear that Jesus took the religious authorities' creedal statement that no work should be done on the Sabbath and then, he still brought healing and hope to a man in direct opposition to those limitations on God's work, do you then think Jesus would turn around and tell us to bring division to people of faith and kill for a false sense of religious purity? And, when Jesus stated in John 8 that the truth would set humanity free, do you think he meant that we should exclude people based on a few verses written by Paul in the light of Jesus's clear preaching on love to all? And if, in John 4, Jesus brought wholeness to a despised ethnic and religious minority from Samaria, don't you think that perhaps, God is calling us to embrace the discomfort of following an unknowable and deeply relational God of love?

So, I wonder if what the festival of Holy Trinity is getting us to embrace is not exactly how the three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exactly work, or where they came from, or for us to spend time figuring out how it all comes together, but rather, that our God is a mysterious combination of entities and attributes that work together because they are in relationship. That the Holy Spirit works to push and pull, to transform and stabilize, to breakdown and build up around the primacy of love.

With that, we are challenged to recognize the importance of relationship over doctrine, to prioritize that what makes us similar, and to live out the example of loving service. In that holy realization, there is the possibility of transformation. For, when we notice that all people want to feel safe, secure, and accepted; when we notice that regardless of whether we eat pitas or tortillas or white bread, we all desire to

nourish the bodies God has given us; when we notice that regardless of what words we use and languages we speak, we all desire to connect; and, when we notice that while we may satisfy our needs in a plurality of methods, while we may interact in distinctive ways, while we may live and prioritize things differently, we are all children of God, created in the image of God with all of our complexities and veiled attributes, then, and only then, can we be transformed in the image of the trinitarian relationship of love.

And, today, we recalled that trinitarian relationship of love during Brandon's and Heather's baptisms. There, we committed to a deepening relationship with God and each other. For, baptism reminds us that in water, wine, and bread, we are all one and entrusted with the care for each other as one. We come to this place where our God is revealed in relationships, known in the unknown, and offers an unrestricted love.

So, today, the trinity liberates us from death-dealing particulars that can become idols of worship and conduits for division. Instead, Woman Wisdom teaches us that to understand is to embrace complex unknowns with grace, love, and relationality. For, Woman Wisdom is God's movement, Logos is God's movement, and that you and I are empowered to be God's loving movement in the world. Amen.