

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's gospel started with Jesus' frustration about the negative response to his teaching. He mentioned that, historically-speaking, some had problems with John the Baptist because he was too demanding. On the other hand, some were frustrated that Jesus was too welcoming. Jesus identified the human truth that sometimes nothing will make us happy. On a simplistic level, we experience it on a hot summer day, when we long for snow; but, in the middle of February, we, then, wish for the hot sun. And this discontentment permeates our lives. During the pandemic, we were frustrated being locked down, and we are equally unhappy when we can emerge but now it's with a mask. Then, in responding to racial inequality, taking a knee was wrong, and peaceful protesting was wrong, and disruptive protesting was wrong too. Sometimes, we, as humans, are never happy no matter the situation. And, frequently, these disgruntled responses come from *our* discomfort. Our discomfort in wearing a mask, our awkwardness in responding to racism and oppression, and, in today's reading, our unease with the true essence of our God.

And, this discomfort is difficult for those of us who think we have God figured out. It's especially true for pastors, vicars, well-read Christians, and those who have been around the church for years. Frequently, our preferred Jesus affirms what we already think, feel, and believe about God. And, this is what Jesus spoke toward in the second part of today's gospel. You see, in verse 25, when Jesus spoke about revealing God's essence to infants, Jesus

reminded us that God is often hidden from those with predetermined notions of God. Instead, those with the fewest illusions about their own power, privilege, and pre-conceived notions are the ones who often recognize God. Those who, like infants, gaze, ponder, and absorb the world around them, it's those infant-like individuals who will often realize the movement of the Spirit.

And, talking about the Spirit, in verse 28, Jesus was speaking in the manner of Woman Wisdom from the Hebrew Scriptures. In Christianity, Woman Wisdom is regularly seen as Christ or the Holy Spirit. Regardless of how we understand her, Woman Wisdom is a feminine way to understand God's presence—after all, we know that God is beyond gender. So, diversifying pronouns for God is an infant-like way to allow us to realize what might have been hidden if we've pre-decided that God is only male. Anyway, what Jesus is doing in verse 28 is important, because he's drawing a connection back to Woman Wisdom found in Jeremiah along with Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (not Ecclesiastes, but Ecclesiasticus). There, in Ecclesiasticus 24:19, Woman Wisdom invites the listener to her feast. It's a feast that we find in the laws given to Moses. Remember, Matthew's gospel that we're studying right now *loves* to make comparisons between Jesus and Moses. And, I think that's part of the reason we have a stain glass window of Moses receiving the law or the Ten Commandments here in our sanctuary. Because, the parallels between Moses and Jesus in Matthew's gospel are endless.

Ok, so why am I nerd-ing out about this? Well, we know that in Matthew Jesus likes to mention the Hebrew Scriptures, Moses, and the law. And, today, Jesus said come to this feast; come partake of the wisdom; come be

one with me like a yoked animal; come learn from me; come grow with me; come and receive eternal life.

And that's the beauty of today's gospel. For, too often we are like those who reject what God is revealing to us. We put on blinders. We are unhappy and frustrated by everything that's offered. We think Jesus, the church, the pastor is too liberal or too conservative. We think that Jesus is unreasonable. That Jesus is too accepting or not welcoming enough. We spend so much time evaluating what Jesus said so that we can refute it or reject it that we don't stop to simply be in Wisdom's presence. We don't stop to listen, learn, and grow. In our desire to quickly respond, we are blinded to God's work, and in that, God feels hidden.

But, today, we are invited to let go of the burdensome idea that we need to know it all. Today, we're called to partner with our God and open our eyes to the embodiment of Wisdom. Then, we are invited to find abundant life through grace. We're offered the opportunity to make love our primary currency. We're freed to respond to evil and oppression so that all might have eternal life.

And, so, I wonder, where our openness to noticing God will bring us? That is, if we are yoked to God's commandment to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40), how might our lives and the world change? And, what if we came to the Scriptures not to find proof for our pre-existing beliefs, but instead, what if we came to the Scriptures to look for faithful methodologies so that we might absorb God's vision with an infant-like demeanor?

If we did, perhaps we would discover that Jesus' complexion was likely Middle Eastern and that the countless representations of Jesus as a white man in the United States has damaged our ability to connect with our siblings who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Maybe with this infant-like behavior, we could come to notice God's presence in every nook, cranny, and person. Perhaps we would recognize Jesus's non-violent resistance and feel empowered to understand and confront gun violence in our city. You see, when we begin to absorb God's presence in our environment, with the likeness of an infant, the possibilities are endless.

And, the thing is: today's gospel is just the beginning. In the weeks ahead, we will find it helpful to remember today's message. For, Jesus will challenge us to reimagine our faith using parables, and Jesus will make the impossible possible using everyday things like bread, water, and death. In all these places, we'll be asked to use infant-like openness to Woman Wisdom, to listen without pre-decision, and to allow the beckoning of Christ to invite us to come—to come follow Christ's example, to come and be nourished in the waters of baptism, and to come to this table to be strengthened and sent become God's presence in our world. Amen.