

“Rooted in Wisdom”

February 26, 2023

Based on \*Genesis 2-3 and Proverbs 8. Wisdom and Knowledge and How to Discern?

\*incarnational translation below

We think we know the story: Adam and Eve, a snake, a fall, and then nakedness, banishment, and, yes, mortality, all in the name of pursuing wisdom.

But there is more to the story than what we read here. The story continues in the Book of Proverbs, Chapter Eight, where we encounter a vision of Wisdom personified, in feminine form! who claims to be a co-worker with God in that very garden of pleasure where the human is planted at the beginning of creation. Proverbs 8 describes Wisdom personified like a master worker, like a delighted child (the Hebrew could be translated either way) right there with God in the beginning, planting a tree of life, delighting in the human race. And also planting a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from which we are *not* supposed to eat, from whose fruits we have experienced so much pain.

According to Genesis, there is a ‘crafty’ serpent enticing Eve and then Adam to eat the fruits of this tree of Wisdom, even when we should not. And according to Proverbs, Lady Wisdom is also there, from the beginning, shouting at the crossroads, commanding Adam and Eve to seek her at all costs. And I think we all can agree it is not always easy to figure out the difference between the “naked intelligence” embodied by the serpent and the divine holy “wisdom” calling out to us in Proverbs.

So we join Adam and Eve in this paradise of creation God has designed for us to enjoy, feasting on the tree of life, but utterly confused and somewhat demoralized by the tree of Wisdom, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree that has fallen into such disrepute. Do we eat? Or don’t we? That is still the question ...

We only have to look at the toxic train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, or the record low levels of the Lake Powell reservoir, or the record low Antarctic sea ice to admit how dangerous our pursuit of Wisdom has become. We humans, who get to *co-create* with a God who *delights* in our capacity for greatness in engineering and technology and business, we now find ourselves at the mercy of the mess we have made in our knowledge of good and evil.

Why, we cry out in agony, *why did we eat that fruit?* What have we done to our garden?!

In the midst of our despair, Wisdom—God’s Wisdom—calls to us still, from the crossroads, from the city streets, from East Palestine, from within this very house of God, and says, “You precious, tragic, beautiful fools! You have missed the entire point! You went for the *fruits* of Wisdom in this garden of ours, but you forgot to tend the *roots*! You went for the unlimited, unsustainable, unrenewable energy necessary to drive your massive economy, but you forgot to secure the well! You precious, tragic, beautiful fools – my people – the ones I love – you go straight for the fruits of Wisdom, but you forget to tend the roots. And now we are all in trouble.”

It is an age-old story, I'm afraid, this pursuit of knowledge, this pursuit of understanding, this pursuit of Wisdom that is, in the end, beyond our grasp. That has always been wrapped up in discerning the subtle distinction between a crafty serpent propelled by naked intelligence leading us astray and a feminine divine leading us to freedom. Wisdom, *true* Wisdom, *God's* Wisdom, is so subtle, so difficult to discern, so fragile that it is no wonder we might throw our hands up in despair and bury our heads in the sand.

In fact, if there is anything I learned at Harvard Divinity School surrounded by all of those very smart people, it is that our brains alone simply cannot save us from our own foolishness, no matter how educated we are, no matter how experienced we are, no matter how creative we are. Only God can do that.

*And that, my friends, is the point!*

Someway, somehow, in spite of our incredibly inadequate efforts to pursue her, Wisdom just keeps calling! God just keeps coming! In the end, Wisdom is a not a piece of information we carry in our heads but *an ongoing relationship with the living God who will not ever let us go!* In the end, Wisdom is *a posture of attentiveness* to what God is doing in our midst and a *companionship* with those who want to share that posture. In the end, Wisdom always calls, and in the end, we always respond. That is how God works. And at the end of the day that is all the wisdom we really need to know.

Let the church say, Amen!

*\*Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7*

God took the human  
and planted it in a garden of relaxing, restful pleasure  
to serve the garden and to protect it.

God commissioned the human, saying,  
“Feel free to eat your fill of every tree of the garden;  
but Thou Shalt Not Eat  
of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.  
That will be the day that you die.”

Now the serpent had become more supposedly sensible  
than any other creature of the earth that God had fashioned.  
The snake said to the woman,  
“Did God really say,  
‘Thou Shalt Not Eat from every tree in the garden’?”

The woman said to the serpent,  
“The fruit of the trees of the garden  
are for us to eat to our heart's content;  
but of the fruit of the tree  
that is in the middle of the garden,

God has said,  
‘Thou Shalt Not Eat it,  
nor shall you two touch it,  
lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman,  
“Surely you two will not *die*?!  
God knows that when you eat of it  
you will see clearly,  
and you both will be like God,  
knowing good and evil.”

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food,  
and that it fulfilled a deep longing for wisdom and insight  
she took of its fruit and ate;

She also gave some to the man,  
who was with her,  
and he ate.  
Then they saw clearly.

They knew that they were naked;  
and they sewed fig leaves together  
and they made loincloths for themselves.

*\*"Incarnational translation for preaching seeks to recontextualize biblical texts so that they say and do in new times and places something like what they said and did in ancient times and places" (Cosgrove and Edgerton, **In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching**, 62).*