

Does Not Wisdom Call?

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United Church of Strafford, Vermont

June 12, 2022 First Sunday after Pentecost, Trinity Sunday

from Proverbs 8; Acts 4:31-35; I John 3:14, 16-17; John 16:12-15

Welcome: Welcome to the United Church of Strafford, Vermont, on this First Sunday after Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. Welcome to those of you in the sanctuary and those online.

It is easy to turn off our brains when we hear church words like Pentecost or Trinity, but behind deadening layers of dogma are real live powers that are facts of nature and experience. Trinity represents the truth that the highest power in the universe is one of relationship. Pentecost represents the explosion of energy when people come into relationship with the Spirit and one another with passion, commitment and love.

We look calm and well behaved here, but in our gathering is a wild power, and if we could somehow hear every breath of prayer, and see every light shined into a neighbor's darkness that has ever graced this room, we would be deafened by the rush of wind and blinded by the fire over our heads.

Pentecost and Trinity tell us that anything can happen when we are one, so please linger after the service to extend your care to one another, in person or on zoom, and be aware that this counter-culture of neighborly love is exactly what our world most needs.

Call to Worship: The ancient Hebrew scriptures recognize a feminine manifestation of God they name Wisdom. Wisdom personifies the organizing patterns, laws and virtues of the universe, what in other traditions is the less personal Sacred Way or Tao.

Wisdom is not like a collection of facts or a body of knowledge, wisdom is something we live in relation to, a path we walk on, a river current we flow with, that can lead us through a changing or chaotic landscape. To be wise is to keep walking that path with our eyes and ears wide open.

Wisdom wants life to survive, thrive and evolve, and it guides and empowers all living things to do so.

When God said to the people through Moses, “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live,” it meant choose to live according to wisdom, because to choose against wisdom is to choose death.

We need to realign human civilization with Wisdom.

Our spiritual traditions teach us how our hearts and minds can learn to perceive wisdom as it speaks within and around us. So let us open now in faith and seek wisdom in the word, music and silence of this service.

Children’s Time: Once two brothers I know were playing on the floor. The four-year-old was happily building with blocks when his five-year-old brother reached over and grabbed the blocks and turned his back and started playing with them himself. There was a whole box of blocks, so it was just mean.

The younger brother blinked as if he might cry for a few seconds, but then he calmly picked up the box and dumped the entire load on his brother’s head. He looked so happy in that moment, as if this would be the end of it...

This is a true story, but it is also a perfect image of so much trouble humans get into. The leader of one nation sees something he wants that a neighboring nation has, and he invades and takes it, and then, of course, the victim gets defensive and vengeful, and before you know it you have war and tremendous suffering and loss.

This is not only mean, it is foolish and immature. It is not what the wisdom of the Spirit that created the earth and all life wants, and so the Spirit helps us grow and evolve. Those brothers grew up to be loving, generous and kind to one another as adults—they learned how to share and live by the Golden Rule.

This is how nations should be, too. When you see violence or greed hurting people or hurting the earth, you can think to yourself, when they grow up and become truly wise and filled with the Spirit, they won’t do this anymore.

The good news is that we can keep growing all our lives. It’s never too late for our hearts to grow more loving and our minds to hear wisdom and change.

We know what the Spirit’s wisdom wants because after the first Pentecost when the followers of Jesus were filled with the Spirit, they became so generous-hearted and felt so much

oneness that no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was shared in common. There was not a needy person among them, for they sold whatever extra things they had and brought the money to be distributed to people in need, so everyone had enough and was happy.

If we want a world with no poverty or war or hate, we need Wisdom, and there is something we can do that opens us to hear the Spirit speak in our hearts and minds...Pray! Especially if we listen more than talk when we pray... Let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

Sermon: *Does Not Wisdom Call?*

This Thursday someone in our Heartfulness meditation group said that the events of recent weeks have tipped them over the edge toward believing that human society and the earth are unraveling. They had been hoping that we were on the brink of a great turning toward oneness, treating other people and the planet with the care necessary to make life sustainable, harmonious and just for all. Now they feel we've gone too far, and the best we can do is prepare for the consequences of our failure to live wisely.

I imagine many of us are close to the despair they are feeling, and on top of what is happening in the world, people we love may be struggling, or our personal lives may be in their own state of chaos or collapse.

What I said to them I say to myself, because my heart aches, too, and I say it to you. We do not have to despair. There is a way through this. We can find that way.

Bill Coffin insisted on hope no matter what the circumstances—not optimism, but hope. The documentary about him, *American Prophet*, ends with interviews with some of his friends. One is Susannah Heschel, the Dartmouth professor and daughter of one of Bill's beloved colleagues, the Rabbi Abraham Heschel. Susannah says in the film that according to Jewish teaching, we are not permitted to despair.

That is wisdom talking in self-defense, because despair cuts us off from what hope makes possible—the ability to open to a way that we have not yet perceived, the ability to hear wisdom calling down a path we did not even know was there.

Cynthia Bourgeault is an extraordinary contemplative teacher and Episcopal priest who has written the books, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing* and *Wisdom Jesus*.

Bourgeault tells the story of a friend who was a potter in Maine who was traveling through a very remote stretch of forest with her entire year's inventory in her car, going to a trade show in Bangor.

The car broke down near dusk in late February on a dirt road used mostly by logging trucks. She started to panic about missing the show and losing her year's income, or someone coming by and attacking her, or freezing to death in the night. Then she remembered her contemplative training in a group like our Heartfulness Circle. She welcomed her panic with compassion and said a prayer to let go of her ego's concerns. She emptied herself, opened in spiritual surrender to what was, saying, "I am here. God is here. I wonder what will happen now?"

Cynthia Bourgeault says that bracing is never worth the cost, and we should not let anything knock us out of presence. This friend of hers recalled those sayings and let herself look around at the beauty of the wilderness where she had broken down. She could see signs of new life coming through the late winter landscape, and she felt hope. She was so immersed that she didn't notice at first the sound of an engine, and when it pulled up she was not afraid. As it turned out, it was a tow truck, heading directly to Bangor.

Cynthia Bourgeault says that "Where there's surrender, synchronicity tends to follow." Jesus would agree that when we willingly lose life we find life, that when we set the life of our self-concerned ego aside, we step onto a path that leads to greater life. Taoism would agree that if we follow the sacred way, we will find resolutions for problems that seemed unsolvable. The Apostle Paul put it this way: "All things work together for the good for those who love God."

Wisdom teachers insist that wisdom is not an instruction manual, it is a co-pilot, a guide, a wizard, a living presence. It is a river current that flows invisibly within and around us that will carry us on a way where we could see no way.

Wisdom is like a tow truck driver who shows up just when we need it, heading exactly where we yearn to go for the sake of life and love.

This is the best of good news because it means that we do not have to figure out how we are going to get out of the breakdown of our car or society or earth. Solutions will not happen by our power, they will happen by a higher power working through us, doing what we could not imagine, or could dream but felt was impossible.

We do not have to know how to work the miracle we need, but we do need to know how to open to it happening through us. This may be the most important instruction that the church has to offer, and is at the core of what Jesus taught. In order to live up to the great commandments to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and love our neighbor, meaning everyone on earth, as our self, and in order to create a world-changing counter-culture like the early church, we need to know how to hear and follow Wisdom, or the Spirit, as it calls.

Here are some of the how-to instructions that Cynthia Bourgeault offers in her books the *Wisdom Way of Knowing* and *Wisdom Jesus*.

“As we actually taste the flavor of what [Jesus is] teaching, we begin to see that it's not proverbs for daily living, or ways of being virtuous. He's proposing a total meltdown and recasting of human consciousness.”

“Philippians 2:5: ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.’ The words call us up short as to what we are actually supposed to be doing on this path: not just admiring Jesus, but acquiring his consciousness.”

“As we enter the path of transformation, the most valuable thing we have working in our favor is our yearning.”

“Most important of all, do everything you can to nurture your spiritual intelligence. It is your only genuine source of hope, direction, meaning, and comfort.”

“Meditation is the tool you use to ‘upgrade your operating system,’ to move...into the more spacious heart awareness that sustains the wisdom way of knowing.”

Our hope for living in the grace and peace of God on earth is the path that Wisdom is calling us to follow. Meditation, spiritual nurture, emptying ourselves of our self are how we hear the calling and walk the path.

Let us recommit ourselves to do so, and let us practice now in a moment of silent prayer...

Haiku by Mel Goertz:

With each sweep of wind
and splash of rain,
white apple trees are turning green.