

This morning's passage from Proverbs is my favorite in this book of the Bible. As we read the passage, there is a clear sense of God's joy and delight ~ especially in the creation and subsequent relationship with humanity.

The parallels with the creation story of Genesis 1 are unmistakable. That's where we are taught that God created all that is in the course of six days, and called each portion of creation good. Of course, as you likely remember, when God created humankind, God blesses us by calling us 'very good.'

Between this morning's passage and Genesis 1, it is clear to me that God thoroughly enjoyed the Creative Act. God's joy and delight is presented, not as a result of God's act of creation, but as a fundamental characteristic of the Creative Act itself. And that has pretty big implications for us as we delight and rejoice in creation, and continue God's work here and now.

I love this passage because it conveys several important ideas: not just lighthearted joy as a fundamental characteristic of God that I just mentioned, but also the inclusive nature and accessibility of God to all people everywhere, and that God's self-identity is shaped primarily by relationship.

We are presented with Lady Wisdom, seemingly popping up everywhere (at intersections, along the country roads, at the town gates), beckoning us to something quite different, and quite better, than the seduction of the adulterer that is presented in the prior chapter of Proverbs. And, the author specifically points out, she is calling out to everyone – not an elite few who are privy to her secrets – but to 'all that live.' Wisdom's message is one that is inclusive and welcoming and because she is ever-present, she intentionally makes herself accessible.

Our author goes on to state, "when there were not depths I was brought forth" (vs 24), "before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth" (vs 25). I'll resist the urge to go into a Hebrew translation lecture, but suffice it to

say, that “brought forth” can also be translated as ‘whirled or danced.’<sup>1</sup> Imagine, Wisdom whirling forth both before creation and as part of the Creative Act. It’s cool to also imagine it dancing all around us right now.

It ought to be noted, especially as this is Trinity Sunday (the one Sunday each year dedicated to a doctrine of the Church), that this passage (among others) is used as Biblical evidence to support the doctrine of the Trinity. While Jesus is obviously not mentioned here, a clear co-eternal relationship with unity of intent, is articulated between Wisdom and the creator.

The way in which Wisdom is presented is as the personification of a companion and participant in the act of creation. And as you can probably guess, she has come to be understood not merely as a companion to God, but as the Holy Spirit, one of the persons of God.

The author for this morning’s passage takes full advantage of vivid language and imagery to not only include us who hear her call, but to draw us into the relationship Wisdom shares with the Creator that is joy-filled and playful in character. So often, when we see some artist’s rendering of Wisdom, we see an image of a stern, tight-lipped person, a killjoy, or a solemn judge in a black gown: the wise sage looking down, commanding reverence and awe by its mere presence. But this author makes it clear that Wisdom is not dour drudgery; rather Wisdom’s nature is joyous laughter, dance, and play. This author’s portrait describes a boisterous divine Wisdom playing with humans, ‘delighting in the human race,’ implying that God rejoices in *us*, in humanity.<sup>2</sup> Yes, God created an orderly (and fair) universe, but God clearly enjoyed God’s own work.<sup>3</sup>

But as this passage from Proverbs points out, reverence and respect for the Holy ought not always be always serious business. Joy, and whirling, and delight are integral to its very character.

St. Augustine of Hippo wrote a treatise on his understanding of the Trinity that took him well over 30 years to write. There is a legend that one day, still struggling to comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity as he walked along the beach,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Paschal in *Feasting on the Word*, vol 3, page 27.

<sup>2</sup> Paschal, page 29.

<sup>3</sup> The Rev. Kathryn Matthews at [https://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_june\\_16\\_2019](https://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_june_16_2019)

St. Augustine came across a little child who was running back and forth with a large seashell full of water, pouring water from the ocean into a hole he had dug in the sand. Augustine asked the boy as he played, "What are you doing?" The boy replied, "I'm trying to put the ocean into this hole." Augustine apparently suddenly realized that he had been trying to put an infinite God into his finite mind: an ocean into a small hole in the sand.

The Church speaks of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as "perichoresis," or holy dance. God is understood not as three persons (although that's generally how we refer to God), but as relationship between the three persons of the God-head. For example, we can't rightly speak of God the Father without implicitly or explicitly referencing the Father's relationship with the Son or the Father's relationship with the Spirit. In the same way, God the Son can only be understood in relationship with God the Father and God the Spirit. Same goes for God the Holy Spirit. These relationships, like any between people, are dynamic and constantly shifting ~ as one moves this way, the others move in response.

Wisdom joyfully whirls in and through and beyond creation – continually bringing forth God's blessings as a graceful, rapturous dance. One of my colleagues writes, "we do not worship a stingy God who grudgingly gives gifts and who grants forgiveness as a divine grump. Not at all. The triune God is a joyous, dancing God who pours out overflowing gifts to humanity with gladness,"<sup>4</sup> thus continuing the Creative Act in and through us even today.

God reveals God's self to us in a wide variety of dynamic ways. We read in this morning's passage a message that is universal, for Wisdom speaks not to insiders, but 'to all that live,' and she makes her appeal in the most public of places, where everyone has access to hear her.<sup>5</sup> And so it is that Wisdom reaches out to us, too, and works in and through even us. It is in this way that we are invited into the dynamic life of God – no one can right speak of any of us as Christians without implicitly or explicitly referencing our relationship with God.

When we enter into relationship with God and with each other, we participate in this delight-filled whirl of creation. It's easy to see specific examples of this:

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<sup>4</sup> Paschal, page 31.

<sup>5</sup> Boyce's entry in *Feasting on the Word*, vol 3.

- when we break down the walls that we build between one other, we whirl and bring forth the oneness of the God-head.
- when we forgive each other for the hurts we cause and the hurts we perceive others to have caused, we restore creation bit by bit to its original state.
- when we shift our attitudes which we think demand division to a recognition of divine diversity, we awaken to God's vision of the restored Kingdom of God.
- when we laugh and play and rejoice and delight, God, too, laughs and plays and rejoices and delights.

Augustine was right: the infinite God is far greater than our finite minds. And yet God continues to seek us out, inviting us to be a part of God's holy, delighting, joy-filled dance.

I stumbled on a blog that highlights poems by Mary Oliver and others entitled Read A Little Poetry.<sup>6</sup> I could find no name for the author, so I apologize for not being able to give credit. But I'll close with a portion of an entry that caught my eye and speaks to me of all of this: to the spirit of **Wisdom**, to the incomprehensible nature of the biggest answers we seek, to the accessibility to what our soul seeks when we allow ourselves to be open, to the movement of the Holy Spirit within a person and it's call to engage on a deeper level ...

A quarter of my life was spent believing things I've been told I should believe. That was problematic, as I have an unnatural habit of asking questions at a young age. I suppose it was because I am a curious creature, but also because I was a child with an unnatural persistence (read: pesky). The *how* and *why* of things is important, and if people can't tell me the answer, then I will endeavour to find out. I will gnaw at that bone until I am satisfied.

This *quest*, in the next few years, have brought me necessary grief, but also an unhealthy expectation for answers. Not having answers put me in a spiral of despair when I was in my teens. I was uncomfortable with the *not knowing*, for a while. It was supposed to be simple and quantitative: here is a question, and here is an answer...

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<sup>6</sup> <https://readalittlepoetry.wordpress.com/2014/01/04/breakage-by-mary-oliver/>

It took me a long time to realise that the reason why I was getting all my answers was because I probably wasn't asking enough questions. And when I started doing that—ask and ask and ask—my discontent multiplied tenfold. But so did my understanding of myself, my life, the world.

It was in the process of asking that I came upon a truth: that the unknown *is* an answer. That there are answers upon answers, and sometimes no questions at all.