

Yr. C, Trinity Sunday
June 12, 2022
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1655 Words

Lessons: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Psalm 8//Canticle 13
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15

I was a pretty nervous child during my elementary school years. One of the places where my anxiety got the best of me was the school cafeteria. I can still remember its awful smell. I remember the ugly green color of those cinder block walls...the piercing noise of a couple hundred children, hollering over each other, with no carpet or curtains to absorb *any* of the chaos. I would gladly have skipped lunch, stayed in the classroom, and waited until 3:00 to snack on graham crackers from our pantry at home.

Sophia speaks...*Wisdom* speaks and She says, “The LORD created me at the beginning...(I was) the *first* of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up...*before* the beginning of the earth. When there *were no depths...before* the mountains had been shaped, *before* the hills...*I was there.*”

On this Trinity Sunday, we are treated to a beautiful poem *about* Wisdom...a poem spoken *by* *Wisdom*. *Sophia* is her name.

I love how beautifully vague our Holy Scriptures are about all of this. Is *She* the Spirit of God, represented so conspicuously as feminine; *or...is* ‘this Wisdom’ the *Word of God* described in the prologue of John’s Gospel—the Word that was *with God...the Word that was God*, through whom all things came into being...this *Word...which* later became flesh, born of the Virgin Mary, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth?

Yes. I think...both is the answer! There’s room for holy suspense about all of this! There’s room for Wisdom...to *still* keep revealing to us the truth about our Creator; the beauty of our Redeemer; and the goodness of our Sustainer.

My childhood anxiety spilled into my extracurricular life as well. Cub Scouts was not *so hard*. I mean, my mom was one of the ‘den mothers.’

But then, I *aged up...into* Boy Scouts. That first rank—*Tenderfoot*—said it all. My tender feet were not quite ready for summer camp, far from home. I’d heard the stories of being forced to go on Snipe hunts in the dark woods; being pushed into the lake by the older boys; sleeping outside with rattlesnakes and black widow spiders; *and*—topping it all off—a really noisy cafeteria with terrible food.

In 2016, a broad-based study highlighted frightening, *record-breaking* levels of anxiety and depression among children and youth in America. You heard me correctly. 2016—four years *before* the added stresses brought on by the pandemic.

Last Sunday afternoon I heard an interview on Public Radio with an expert who contrasted the adolescence of the 21st century with the adolescence of prior centuries. In the old days, adolescence was brief. The choices were limited, and the training was minimal. Farm work or factory work? Would you like to marry ‘person A’ or ‘person B’?

Now, though, puberty is starting *younger* for reasons we still don’t understand. This means that our children are experiencing *all* the physical and emotional disruption at younger ages *without the benefit* of a more developed prefrontal cortex to regulate their way through all of the questions and confusion. Plus, there’s tons more data and stimuli for them to sort through and try to figure out how they fit into this complex world.

The good news is that there are so many more possibilities of what our children and youth might want to do with their precious lives. The bad news is that it will take a lot more education for them to achieve. There are longer periods of preparation, which can so easily begin to look like more chances to fail.

It makes *me* feel anxious, just naming it all out loud. It makes my childhood cafeteria anxiety seem pretty ridiculous. It also makes the decline in Church engagement by young families so much more clear.

You see, there are no obvious achievement rewards for engaging in Church. Sunday School...will *not* get you into a better college. Worship literally competes with the sports team you feel like you need to join. Youth Group does not promise to get you a bigger scholarship as other extracurricular activities try to promise.

The pressure on our children, youth, and parents to constantly perform is so great that most of them—if they even have a clear spot on their schedules Sunday morning—they just want to rest. They don't want to rush out the door, smile, and pretend that everything's perfect. The Church is the *one treadmill* you can step off without suffering *any* vocational, financial, or even reputational damage.

There is good news for our children and youth and their parents. It comes straight out of the ancient book of Proverbs. The Proverbs of Solomon were written down to transmit insights whereby a youth might learn how to cope with this life. How about that—a book that is thousands of years old, *and relevant as ever!* (You should read it this week.)

“Does not Wisdom call...? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: ‘To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to *all that live.*’”

Y'all—our expectations are flawed. We suspect that wisdom is only available to the select few, the brilliant. Most of us easily imagine Wisdom on the heights, lofty and out of reach. And She *is there*, but that is not the *whole story* from the Book of Proverbs!

Sophia's poem makes totally clear that She is also *right beside us* on the way. She is at *our crossroads*, calling out to us. She's next to the gates where *everyone* enters. She...is...available to *all that live*.

In the early centuries, the Church got this completely right! The Gnostic heretics wanted to treat our faith as something secretive, elusive, that *only* the advanced believers could access. But the Church—in her *wisdom*—said, “No! Salvation is freely offered to *all*. The gifts of God are for *all the people of God*, not the select few. Christian faith is accessible...and comprehensible to anyone.”

I want to take you back in time with me to Camp Barstow. It was a hot, summer day when I put on a life jacket and was handed a paddle. It was finally my turn to earn the canoeing merit badge, the highlight of my otherwise miserable week away from home.

I think this moment might be a nice metaphor—not only for where we may find ourselves—anxious and depressed; but it's also a metaphor about the promise of Wisdom.

After learning the basics of safety, and after practicing the ‘J stroke’ with my paddle, there was a merit badge requirement that made me feel...anxious. The other boy in the canoe and I were told we had to tip it over—*on purpose*. So, we set our paddles down at our feet, and then leaned, nervously, to the side. The lake water began gushing in over the long ledge of the canoe.

That! That's what anxiety and depression can feel like. It can feel like it's gushing in, uncontrollably, and nothing will stop it.

More and more water poured in...until we *lost our balance* and just flipped.

Sound familiar? It can be so frustrating to recognize that you are 'off balance,' to see all the problems pouring in too fast, and to feel like you are losing control of your situation.

When you finally flip—when you finally flip out, it is never elegant! At Camp Barstow it involved spewing the lake water out of our mouths and out from our noses. It involved splashing about, trying to squeeze the water out of our eyes and find the canoe. When confronting our anxiety and depression, we often appear just as disorderly...unfocused...and out of control.

That summer day at Camp Barstow, our canoe was *totally* filled with water. When my partner and I finally stopped flailing about, the scout leader said, "*Get back in the canoe.*" We did as we were told. "Now, get your paddles. (It's good to have *wooden paddles, by the way...they float!*)" Then he said, "Now make your way back to the shore."

Do you know what's miraculous? That totally swamped canoe did not sink to the bottom of the lake. I'm sure our engineers can offer an answer for why canoes do not act like boats when they are filled with water, but for me—it was a miracle—a memorable miracle from Camp Barstow.

Now, it's not the ideal way to travel to the shore. It's definitely not the *fastest way* to get back safely. But the good news...is that you are unsinkable. The canoe *will not* take you down. Like Wisdom, she will stay *with you*...beside you...all around you as you make your way home.

The Church has a special gift to offer, the gift of Wisdom—*beautiful* in her loftiness, and *comforting* in her nearness. We have the gift of God's Word—dwelling among us, *full of grace and truth*.

And we give this gift away...*for free*, because it is a gift which is intended for *all that live*. There's *nothing else like it* to help youth and adults learn to cope with this life.

Dear people, you don't need me to tell you that anxiety and depression are hard. It's tough to keep your balance when it feels like the water is gushing in so fast.

And yet, God is near. You will not sink. You *cannot* sink. The love of God surrounds you on every side. The Word of God surrounds us on every side.

Sophia, beautiful as ever, is not just up on the heights, majestic and unreachable. She is *with us*...from before the beginning of the earth she has been with us...at our crossroads, in the midst of our disasters, through our anxieties. She is with us, and she will remain with us all the way, safely home.

Amen.