

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Wisdom's Call

Old Testament Lesson

Proverbs 8:22-36 (NRSV)

- ²² The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.
²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—
²⁶ when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.
²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,
³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.
³² "And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways.
³³ Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.
³⁴ Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.
³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD;
³⁶ but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death."

Bible/Sermon Focus

This week we heard pastor Andy say "It's beautiful to think of how Sophia was whirled into being, born of God the creator, before anything else." It is beautiful. It's also strange and amazing on many levels. On one level it's strange and amazing because of the very mysterious nature of this Sophia. On another level it's strange and amazing that even though Sophia/Wisdom/the Spirit is so prevalent in the Old and New Testaments, so few of us have ever heard of *her*.

What do we do with this feminine aspect of God? The Bible says *she* was at the beginning of creation more than one time. The Spirit/Breath of God is always feminine in the Old Testament. She's present in the Bible. And the Bible says She's present in the world (proverbs 8:1-21). She's everywhere and yet we do not share her story. Scholars put her (spirit/breath) in all four creation stories in the Bible (Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Proverbs 8, and John 1). There is solid scholarship that God's Wisdom and God's Word are the same thing. Theologian Marcus Borg says we should read John 1 as follows: "In the beginning was Sophia, and Sophia was with God and Sophia was God."

What do we do with this feminine aspect of God? To simply dismiss her is to disregard God described within scripture, as we have for centuries under the influence of patriarchy. To include her in our metaphors and doctrine proves tricky as well. The most conservative way to handle this in theology is to say that the third aspect of the Trinity, the Spirit, is feminine. Otherwise, things get a bit gender bending. Here's a couple examples. We can say that God's

Wisdom, this feminine aspect of God is simply the wisdom of the male Triune God. But then how is *she* there before creation? Is God to be understood as trans or intersex? If the "Word" (logos) of God has classically meant Jesus and the "Wisdom" of God (Sophia) has classically meant the Holy Spirit, and you begin interchanging them, is Jesus then female? If God nurses Wisdom does that make the first person of the Trinity mother and not father...or both?

All of this is to say that there should be, there needs to be, some conversation and reconciliation around the feminine divine within the Christian Church. We have begun the steps of reconciliation in allowing female scholars to finally do theology in the academy (and be ordained in the church), but that is less than fifty years in the making in any substantial way. And those conversations rarely make it to the pulpit, the local Bible study, or into the hymnal.

Take time with these scriptures. Let them roll around your brain and dance in your heart. Think deeply about who Sophia is and how she fits into your concept of God. Knowing her, she'll probably make a way where we thought no way was possible.

Discussion Questions

1. Read the rest of Proverbs 8 (verses 1-21) and share your reactions to this figure, Wisdom.
2. Can you imagine God as female?
3. Proverbs 8:22-30 is considered by scholars the third creation story in the Bible. Read Genesis 1:1-2. Do you like the addition of the Proverbs creation story? Why or why not?
4. Reflect on this quote Dr. Karen Baker-Fletcher, "Jesus the Christ is the incarnate Word/Wisdom of God, who was with God at creation... Jesus as incarnate Word/Wisdom of God...[brought] the good news of the living Hokmah/Sophia to the poor, to captives, to the sick, to the lame, to the outcast, and to all those ready to receive forgiveness for their sins."
5. Knowing we will all have different answers, what are God's pronouns (for the Triune God, and each of the three persons of the Trinity)?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, God Incarnate, Parent and Creator, surround us and guide us with your wisdom as you twist and turn and dance among us. Heal your people. Inspire actions of peace and justice and love among us. Help us to hear Sophia calling us to walk in the way of righteousness; calling us, as a community, here and now, to be created anew; calling us, here and now, to be the living redemption of the pain of the past; calling us, here and now, to share the love of God and give witness to its effects in the world around us. Amen.

"Given Sophia's activity, which is clearly proper to God alone, this figure is no angel or mere feminine aspect of the divine. Rather, Sophia represents Israel's robust God in active, redeeming engagement with the world, and does so in a way that uses female images equivalent to the male images used elsewhere in scripture." - Dr. Elizabeth A. Johnson