Sunday 12th June 2022

Proverbs 8: 1-4 & 22-31. John 16: 12-15

We read the beginning of Proverbs and we are introduced to Wisdom, personified. And she is described as calling out and raising her voice. When does that usually happen?

It is not always in anger that voices are raised, often we would call out if we saw someone in danger, raise our voices to gain attention. When voices are raised in anger, you can generally trace it back to the root of wanting to be listened to as you have something important that you want to have heard.

We are told that Wisdom raises her voice in all situations and stages of our journey. And she is always willing to speak, she is accessible to everyone – to all mankind.

We are told that she will call out where the paths meet. How many of us have had to make decisions in our life? Have they all been easy? But we are told that Wisdom is there with us on the path. She never tries to hide.

Sometimes knowing the right thing is easy. Consider litter. If we have enjoyed a sandwich, or a packet of crisps, we know that when we have finished we should put the packaging in a rubbish bin. It is the right thing to do, to keep our beautiful creation just as that, beautiful. And yet, if even that was simple, how come I was picking up these items on Friday morning that had been thrown in our drive?

Even in that small decision making for some people the inconvenience of carrying the litter to a bin is too great. Their own comfort and desire not to bother so that they can do something better overcomes the wisdom.

Perhaps when we have felt wisdom is hiding it is that we have not wanted to listen to what is being said. It does not compute with our own understanding of knowledge and we have not been ready to hear an alternative. Or we have not been able to put our self to one side. I do not know the answers as it will be different for each of us.

But we are told here that Wisdom is always calling to us. The proverb continues to state that Wisdom is beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance.

In the time of Jesus, it was by the gate that the leaders would meet to discuss business. Can you envisage wisdom as a person in the midst of a meeting, calling and shouting the way to go. Can you envisage wisdom shouting in parliament? Well, she is. I am not sure how many decide to listen. But it is human nature to get caught up in the moment, lean on our own understanding and continue in our knowledge. How often do we stop to take a moment, to pray, to allow our attitudes to be changed? If it is not always natural for us, why should we expect it to be for others?

But we must be assured that Wisdom is there and will never hide, if anyone chooses to stop and listen for her voice.

By the city gate – is also where ordinary people would pass to get to the city square, into the throng of activities. Wisdom is calling to everyone. Giving insight as to which people to avoid, who would try to rob you, the traders that delight in cheating you – the call of the gamblers, the prostitutes, other religious leaders who would lead you away from God who loves you.

Everywhere we go, there is going to be temptation and evil will be lurking. Wisdom will continue to be calling through all of it. But there has to be a choice made to listen – and follow.

The proverb tells us that wisdom is available to everyone, there is no discrimination; rich, poor, intellectual, academic, creatives, humble, proud, male or female – wisdom will continually cry out to all, shouting to gain attention.

Wisdom is NOT prophecy or a special gifting. The opposite of not following wisdom, is folly.

But what is Wisdom then? We are told that she was present at creation, even before creation. So let us go back to Genesis 1: 1-2 where it states “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”.

The Spirit was with God. So wisdom must relate to God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Three working in unity as One. Let us not get confused – wisdom is being personified in the proverb, but it is NOT a separate part of God, it is not a separate spirit.

As creation formed, wisdom was involved. It means that our Holy Trinity shared wisdom together in that time of creativity. There is equality in the Trinity.

If someone separates God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit into a hierarchy, then that is a Unitary belief. But if the belief is that the three worked in unity, equal and joined to each other as one, that is our Trinitarian belief. It is a view that is a mystery and difficult to explain in words, but it is an opinion that can separate and divide – that is what divided Particular Baptists from General Baptists in history.

As I say, we worship the Holy Trinity, equal and joined to each other as One. Wisdom is not a fourth person of the Trinity – but it is an aspect that is present in them all. As the world and everything in it was created, the wisdom behind the workings and togetherness of all things was witnessed by those present – being God. So we must conclude that when wisdom calls to us, it is about every aspect of things created – our world, the plants, the animals, each other. So the wisdom that is being spoken of will be in relationship to caring for each of those things. But doesn’t every decision we make have consequences on everything else? Going back to the example about littering, throwing rubbish down has bigger consequences. We have all seen pictures of marine animals being choked or unable to eat because of plastic bags that have entangled themselves around their mouths.

Some decisions we would think are obvious, avoid gambling because of the financial consequences on yourself and wider family. Avoid drinking too much, or taking drugs, because of the pain that is caused. I am sure we can all think of different vices to avoid and the reasons why – and yet so many people do not avoid them.

Wouldn’t it make life and decisions easy if wisdom was a person, someone shouting at us? Because, although wisdom is not hiding, the wisdom of God, our Spiritual wisdom does need to be discerned. And very often it is not simply about avoiding something, but seeing a valid alternative.

For those who do succumb to temptations that lead to pain and suffering, I would suggest that often there was a deep pain troubling them and they could not see an alternative rather than trying to bury that pain in something that gave release from it – even short term and would lead to something even more painful – but it gives an escape.

Wisdom needs to be long-sighted in order to help us see the benefits. To gain true happiness and contentment, scars need to be addressed and pain confronted in order that it can no longer have a hold on us.

Wisdom can guide us to what to avoid but can also call us to what can help. Spiritual wisdom will always lead us into the love of God.

We are told in John the wisdom of the kingdom of God will only be given to each of us in the measure we can bear and wisdom will be imparted through the Holy Spirit, when we allow Him to dwell within us.

This does not mean that wisdom is ONLY in the Holy Spirit, as John states that He is not speaking on His own, only what He hears.

This also does not mean that He does not have wisdom within Himself. What is imparted is not merely limited to what He knows but is dependent on what He hears. This is an example of the Trinity working together as One – Jesus stating in words the working together of the Three.

The Holy Spirit is described as a witness. A witness will have knowledge of all that has been seen by them, but often in a court room they are not invited to tell the whole story at once, it will be revealed as one question at a time.

If you have seen something that you need to impart to a friend that you know will cause pain. Take a moment to consider an example of something. How would you tell that to your friend? Would you just blurt it all out, or would you be gentle, reveal one part and then deal with the reaction before revealing another aspect. There may be details that are not needed to be told.

That is how the Holy Spirit reveals things to us, in accordance with what we can bear. The Holy Spirit was there at the creation of all things and has wisdom to how all things interact with each other. And when we hear and follow, we are allowing God to reign over us and on earth.

So when we do spend time listening and earnestly seeking wisdom it will be revealed. But we need to be aware that the story will continue, the voice of wisdom will continually be calling to us. If wisdom is continually speaking, we must be continuously listening.

Wisdom is not self-seeking, but will be for the benefit of creation interacting together in the way that God desires. Isn’t that wisdom worth listening to? And wisdom will never stop wanting to be heard until God’s kingdom comes in fullness – so I pray that we will never stop wanting to listen.