

LADY WISDOM: LOUD, ASSERTIVE, SASSY, SERIOUS, ALLURING PLAYFUL

Ken Wilson 6.16.19

Reading today is helpful for *adjusting* our feelings toward God, especially if those feelings have been shaped by forms of Christianity are about **imposing power** or have a **mission to defend traditional hierarchies** (men over women, etc.) al

Hebrew Bible and Newer Testament have a lot **ambivalence** about hierarchies—necessary for maintaining order where chaos is even worse ... but when Israel wanted to name a King, God said—*Don't do it! You'll be sorry!* Israel went ahead anyway ...

NT acknowledges the necessity of some hierarchy ... but includes a stream of **radical non-conformity** to them: ***“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*** (Gal. 5:28)

[Vatican didn't get memo—recent document urges educators and parents to resist making space for transgender students, ignoring medical research, making life even harder for them. We need a better vision of God than celestial enforcer of all our binaries]

Today, take some consolation and inspiration from a much-overlooked stream in the tradition informing our view of God.

Listen, Wisdom is calling. Yes, Understanding is shouting for us. Wisdom stands at the top of the hill, by the road where the paths meet. She is near the entrance to the city, calling from the open gates. “I am calling out to all of you. I am speaking to everyone. I grew up as a child by God's side, laughing and playing all the time. I played in the world he made and enjoyed the people he put there.” (Proverbs 8)

Three sections in Bible Jesus & Paul knew: **Torah; Prophets, Writings.** Writings: Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs—each subversive to conventional piety. Job has horrible friends quoting Scripture to him all day to add to his considerable sufferings; refrain of Ecclesiastes is “Vanity all is vanity” and versions of “Eat /Drink/be merry for tomorrow you die”

Proverbs: 2 such strands: 1. Open embrace of **contradiction**: *Do not answer a dolt by his folly, lest you, too, be like him. (26:4) Answer the dolt by his folly, lest he seem wise in his own eyes.*" (26:5) 2. Depiction of **Lady Wisdom/Sophia**

Lest we think this is some quirky OT thing: Jesus identified himself with Wisdom; Paul echoes this: "*Christ, the wisdom of God*"

Today's reading is from Proverbs 8, where Lady wisdom is Loud, Assertive, Sassy, Serious, Alluring, and Playful. [Alter translation]

LOUD/ASSERTIVE/SASSY first: *Look! Wisdom calls out, and Discernment lifts her voice. At the top of the heights, on the way, at the crossroads, she takes her stand, by the gates, at the city's entrance, at the approach to the portals, she shouts:*

In traditional societies (like one that generated this text) women are segregated from men, keep a low profile in public, keep their eyes down in presence of men. [Kashmir]

Lady W. is LOUD! And she's ASSERTIVE with POWERFUL MEN (gates, city entrance, portals were haunts of powerful men)

You could call her SASSY: *To you, men, I call out, and my voice to humankind. Understand shrewdness, you dupes, and fools, make your heart understand.* (Whoopi Goldberg, Amy Schumer)

In same vein, Lady Wisdom is SERIOUS, especially in relation to the powerful, not to be trifled with.

Just a sampling: *"Listen, I speak noble things, my mouth's utterance—uprightness. For my tongue declares truth, and my lips loath wickedness* [power taking advantage over vulnerable]

Mine is counsel and prudence, I am Discernment, mine is might. Through me kings reign, and rulers decree righteous laws. Through me princes hold sway, and nobles, all the judges of earth.

But her **normal mode** toward humans who feel weak, or insecure or frightened or anxious in relation to God is ALLURING

I, all my lovers I love, and my seekers do find me.

Just that alone: how would it change our understanding of God if we saw God's wisdom as alluring—something that makes us **woozy** ... that we can **fall into** like falling love?

[Elaborated in Prov 9]

PLAYFUL: *And I (Wisdom) was by Him, an intimate, I was His delight day after day, playing before Him at all times, playing in the world, His earth, and my delight with humankind.*

(8: 30-31)

So much here to ponder. (Great text to use for meditation)

God and Wisdom are depicted as intimates ... God is drawn to Lady Wisdom and Lady Wisdom is drawn to God

There's something here about joy and fun and delight as the way God is inviting us to engage the gift of the world to us ... and what does that convey to us about God?

It would be fun to tie each of these traits of Lady Wisdom to Jesus but I want to keep the focus on the depiction of wisdom as a woman because it's been so under-appreciated.

I do wonder if Jesus wasn't intimate with Lady Wisdom like God is

Indications Jesus had a mystical connection with Lady Wisdom that shaped his spirituality. A 13th C. French Nun/Mystic, **Marguerite of Oingt** has a prayer that goes "Jesus, you are my mother..."

Playfulness is something we associate with children. Jesus made **child-likeness** centerpiece of his spirituality because he was unafraid and unapologetic about **embracing vulnerability**—something we often avoid at all costs

But as Brene Brown's research tells us, there is a **wisdom** in embracing our vulnerability that we often miss.

A lot of couples break up using anger [makes perfect sense when there's abuse or betrayal in relationship]. But people break up for other reasons than that. And sometimes the way to do a break up that's clean is to have dinner, share things appreciate about each other, have a good cry and part. Sadness is often the more honest emotion in a break up And its more vulnerable than anger.

Anyway, there's a child-like quality to the spirituality of Jesus that is **unafraid of vulnerability** ... and I just wonder if Jesus didn't get that originally from mystical experience with Lady Wisdom

End with a final word: DELIGHT

Look! Wisdom calls out, and lifts her voice ... And I was by Him, an intimate, I was His delight day after day, playing before Him at all times, playing in the world, His earth, and my delight with humankind. (8: 1, 30-31)

To play is to delight in your surroundings or in yourself or in others—and usually all three.

Robert Alter, our translator, indicates there are two likely senses of delight here:

1. ***“My delight with humankind”*** could mean **“the delight she takes in humanity”** That is, **the delight she takes in all of us.**

“Us” is important. Lady Wisdom was non-conforming to some social conventions: LOUD, ASSERTIVE TOWARD POWER, SASSY, SERIOUS, ALLURING, PLAYFUL—not a list of traditional feminine qualities. We might embrace other people who don't fit into our little “how to be cool” categories. We might accept/embrace those things in ourselves.

In other words, Wisdom increases our capacity to delight in those this world doesn't always have the wisdom to delight in.

2. “**My delight with humankind**” could also refer to the **capacity to delight** that Lady Wisdom possesses and conveys to humankind

Wisdom helps us take delight--in our surroundings, in others, in ourselves

The Book of Delights by Ross Gay

Everyday something happens or we encounter something that if could take delight in—if we took time, if we noticed, if we were pre-disposed to taking delight

Idea here is like that. Lady Wisdom wants to give us her capacity to take delight wherever it can be had.

Let’s keep that sense in mind as we meditate on this text.

QUIET REFLECTION

Get comfortable, close your eyes if you like, take a few deep breaths ...

Be present in space—let sounds, feel of air around you ... imagine wisdom as a womanly presence ...Open our heart to her influence especially this capacity she has take delight

For next 2 minutes, I’ll read our text every 30 seconds for us to ponder. As your mind wanders return the focus on text.

And I (Wisdom) was by Him, an intimate, I was His delight day after day

[LOUD/ASSERTIVE/SASSY/SERIOUS/ALLURING/PLAYFUL] ***playing before Him at all times, playing in the world, His earth, and my delight with humankind.*** (8: 30-31)