

When Wisdom Grows Weary

Proverbs 1: 20-33: Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded, and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster." Wow! That little piece of Scripture will set your eardrums on fire!

But then, as now, there were many voices shouting multiple versions of their particular truth. And also then, as now, hearing the voice of Wisdom, the voice of God, over the clamor is very challenging. On the face of it, this is a pretty brutal proclamation. Wisdom's tirade is hard to hear but makes a lot of sense when we think about it! When we turn our eyes to the suffering and pain of refugee children still separated from their parents, and the endless struggle of so many people being brutalized by despotic governments, pushed and herded like criminals, and how many vulnerable children and others are dying while countries worry about protecting their borders, we might hear Wisdom's harsh words differently. When I think on the hatred cut loose in the world, I hear less of a tirade and more of God's ultimate sadness and lament that we just refuse to love one another, that we consistently choose alienation and hatred and fear over the simple, obvious beauty and promise of God's love. Love God and love your neighbor. When people are in pain, when they are hungry, when they are thirsty, excluded and oppressed, when they are desperate for hope and freedom *love them*, put yourselves in their shoes and do for them what you would want done for yourselves. Forget our manmade creeds, tribes, religions and political loyalties and feed them, clothe them, give them water and welcome them. Among all of messages of God's prophets and sages one clear note has been sung repeatedly. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all of mind, and all of your soul and all of your will and love your neighbor as yourself." As Wisdom delivers her message with the voice of a prophet, she is simply saying *return*. Return to the heart of God. And as scorching as this message is to all who will listen to her anger and frustration, it is less a voice of condemnation than one of a desperate plea of a mother to her children as she sees them choosing a destructive path. Not even the most loving God can keep us from suffering the consequences of our actions. Who among us who has had a child go astray has not

longed to use any means, any words possible to save them from the consequences of a destructive path?

How many among us have wept from the helplessness of watching someone you love suffer with no power to change his or her minds? How much more so with God? Return to me---this is God's eternal call.

The place where I struggle with Wisdom's pronouncement is how she tells us this is a simple straightforward message. I actually do agree the message is simple and straight-forward, but allowing the transformation that is required to become deeply aligned with God's purposes---that is where the struggle begins!

Jesus tells us, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

This is yet another way of God saying, "Return to me."

To be able to return to God from the places we have become lost in self, in culture, life, scarcity, anger or even simple distraction—well, that requires transformation.

Transformation requires us to change our minds about...

who we are, what we think, who we love, who we reject and to change our minds about who or what we really serve. This is the part of Jesus' message that doesn't sell so well...transformation asks us to give up comforting ourselves and instead dismantle ourselves.

Giving up our lives means to empty ourselves of our own egos, preconceptions, and certainties, and to become vulnerable to the realities of our failures and grief's, and to let go of our illusions of control. When Jesus says "life" he is referring to what the Greek language would call psyche. Ego is actually a fairly new word and Jesus would not have used it. So Jesus is saying that the salvation of the psyche—or soul—begins with its own demise. This is the challenge. Author Ken Wilbur says that in popular American usage, "soul" has come to mean little more than, "the ego in drag." And as Barbara Brown Taylor says, "We have been eating the spiritual equivalent of fast food, where religion is about comforting the self, not losing it."^[1]

Transformation requires less self-comfort and more wrestling in discomfort as we push up against our own prejudices and fears. Losing our life to find it means embracing our own frailties and vulnerabilities and shortcomings to such an extent that we can do no other than to see our own fragile humanity reflected in the faces of black men and women, the poor and homeless and in the eyes of Syrian, Sudanese or Central American refugees. Losing our lives to find them means confronting our own failure to fully reflect God in our lives and world, and then being thrown to our knees with the wonder and beauty of God's love and grace.

God does not wait until we are perfect to love us. Therein lies the hope and the promise that God's prevailing message of love might be attainable after all.

God loves us. God cajoles us, God screams at us; God promises us that the world is a place of wonder when we love one another as God loves us. God is crying out in the streets, "Return to me." Amen.

^[1] Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, pg. 87, Harper One, NY, New York 2014.