

Proverbs 1: 22-33 "Wisdom of the Crowd" Rev. Janet Chapman 9/16/18

We have entered that season of television where we learn what series will be returning this fall and what won't. Whether due to low ratings or sexual harassment charges toward the lead actor, CBS elected not to continue the drama called "Wisdom of the Crowd." I confess I watched it simply because the name caught my interest. It was about a visionary tech innovator who created a cutting-edge crowd sourcing app to solve his daughter's murder. Inspired by the notion that a million minds are better than one, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur develops "Sophe," an online platform for publicly shared information that he's certain will find his daughter's killer. Series authors must have known that Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom so this new computer app is linked to the wisdom one gains from consulting the crowd. Sophia is Lady Wisdom whom we meet in our Proverbs text today, believed by many to represent the ever searching, ever challenging Spirit of God. Wisdom shows up in the places where human beings live their lives on a daily basis. She shows up in busy streets, the public square and City Hall, in businesses and homes. For that failed TV show, she shows up in the hands of the crowd through their cell phones.

Honestly, it is hard sometimes to envision wisdom in the crowd, in the multitudes we see around us. Maybe that is because stupidity speaks louder than wisdom. Bertrand Russell is quoted as saying that a "stupid (person's) report of what a clever (person) says can never be accurate, because (he or she) unconsciously translates what is heard into something (they) can understand." Albert Einstein says "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe." Laurence J. Peter says, "Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are just putting us on, or by imbeciles who really

mean it.” All of these I got from a book that concludes with Winston Churchill saying, “It is a good thing for an uneducated person to read books of quotations.” So there you go.

Proverbs is exactly that – a lot of quotations, quips, and sayings, with very little drama thrown in. It is known as wisdom literature and it is a good thing to read in a culture where the church is but one voice among many, clamoring for the attention of the crowd. The authoritative female figure cries out, just as a mother might with a resistant teenager, how long will you ignore me? Why do you resist wisdom? And the answer is, of course, because we are overwhelmed with options, choices, and advice. We are lulled into turning our heads away from climate change, now being termed climate chaos, no matter how many times we experience the hottest year on record. We are assuaged with promises of a greater America without having to change our ways; we bury our head in the sand so that we don’t have to see the suffering around us; we wonder around in a daze as we walk off a cliff. We are a crowd coming to an all-you-can-eat buffet having just eaten our fill. Despite all the gloom and doom, Lady Wisdom doesn’t give up on us and encourages us not to give up. She encourages a path which uses the practices of God over the so-called wisdom of the crowd. This way of life becomes visible as ordinary people search together for specific ways of taking part in the practices of God. As Proverbs 3: 18 says, it is like a tree whose branches reach out toward the future, even when the earth is shaking, because it is nourished by living water. Nourished by living water which is from God, we branch out choosing a life of wisdom over foolishness.

Maybe this kind of living is best understood with a story called “The Search” by John Aurelio. Once upon a time, there was a man named Count Corky who was deemed the smartest man in the world. He had read every book there was and people came from all

around the world to learn from him. No problem or complex theory was too difficult for him to solve. One day, Count Corky went for a walk along the beach. He came upon a little boy who had dug a hole in the sand and was trying to scoop water from the sea and fill up the hole with water. Some would have thought it funny to see this boy repeatedly return to the sea and get water to pour into the hole, only to have the sand soak up the water. But not Count Corky. To him, it was a problem to be solved, with the answer being that it is impossible. He told the boy exactly that, but the boy said, "No, it's not. If I wanted to, I could put the ocean into this hole." "Nonsense," retorted the count. So the boy showed him by digging a channel from the edge of the sea all the way to his hole on the shore. The water from the sea then poured into the hole. "There," the little boy said, "The hole is now a part of the sea." "Incredible," said the count, "How can such a young boy have such wisdom?" The boy stopped him, "I'm not such a young boy, I'm over 800 years old and where I come from people live to be 2-3 thousand years old." "Impossible," said the count, "No one lives that long. Where do you come from?" "The Great Land," the boy answered. "Where is the Great Land and how do I get there?" asked Corky. "Ask the book," the boy replied and then disappeared. In his place, was a large black, book which the Count promptly picked up and flipped to the first page. It had only one page and it was blank. The Count was dumbfounded, then remembering what the boy said, he asked the book, "Where is the Great Land and how do I get there?" Slowly words began to appear which said, "You must LAUGH." The Count frowned, "Who has time to laugh?" It had been years since he had laughed and he wasn't sure he remembered how. But that is what the book said and more than anything else, he wanted to go to the Great Land. So he left his many books, his castle and the seashore and set about to learn to laugh. He went to a nearby village

where he found children and set down to watch them when they laughed. Mimicking them, he squinted his eyes, crinkled his nose, curled up his lips, puffed up his cheeks and said, "HA!" The noise startled him, and he looked around to see if anyone had heard him for it was embarrassing. He repeated it over and over until he could put several "Ha, Ha's" together. When it sounded right, he realized he had forgotten about his eyes, nose, and lips and decided he must now know how to laugh. He returned to the book and said, "Watch, I can laugh now" and very seriously, he said, "Ha! Ha! Ha!" He opened the book and the words now said, "You must CRY." "Oh stuff and nonsense," said the count. But again, he returned to the village. Being intelligent and a quick learner, he noted that when people cried, their eyes became narrow, squinting like laughing but this time, their mouths turned upside down and tears flowed. It was difficult but he finally imitated crying and returned to the book. "Watch, I can cry now," he said and proceeded to sob, with tears, as though he was really crying. He opened the book and it said, "You must SING." "Enough," he shouted, "How much must I endure?" But the words were clear, so he set out to learn to sing. He admitted singing was easier than the other two for it was mathematical, with rules and scales. Soon he was singing Do, Re, Mi, Fa and so on, and picked up the book to show his newfound skill. This time when he asked, "Where is the Great Land and how do I get there?", the page simply said, "Take hold of me and JUMP!" His keen mind went to work, "Jump? Jump where?" Only the ocean was before him. Did that mean the Great Land and all its treasures were on the other side of the ocean? To get there, he surmised, he must learn to swim, so he read all the books on swimming and started out across the ocean, but when the waves got too rough, he went back to learn about boating and took out a boat. Again, stormy waves turned him back. With no other choice and greatly

frustrated, he picked up the book again, knowing that if he just jumped into the ocean he would drown. However, he also knew he would never be satisfied unless he learned the secret of the boy's wisdom. So he took a breath, held it – and jumped. He waited to hear the splash, to feel the water, but it didn't happen. He knew it was impossible, but he felt like he was floating. He kept his eyes closed while he felt this glorious feeling of floating. No wisdom could ever explain it, but that was what he was doing. When he felt himself come back to earth, he opened his eyes to find he was in the exact spot he left. For the first time in his life, he was confused and disappointed. Was it all just a hoax? Then he heard in the distance the happy sounds of children playing, chasing a butterfly down the beach, jumping, laughing and swinging their arms. At first, he ignored them as their calls to him went unnoticed. Then he became intrigued with their antics. The more he watched, the more absorbed he became, until he lost complete control of his senses and joined them in chasing the playful butterfly. Quite suddenly he began to laugh and the very sound of it made him laugh more. The feeling was wonderful, exhilarating. Then the butterfly switched direction and children quickly turned and tripped over each other. A few children started to cry and Corky came over to comfort them. Another strange thing happen – seeing them hurt and upset, he found himself moved to great compassion, his eyes began to fill and then overflow with real tears. He was crying – for the first time in his life, he was crying. Another child said, "What can we do to feel better?" Corky said, "I know, let's sing a song." He pulled them to their feet and they all started singing "London Bridge is Falling Down." Soon they were all singing, circling around, and falling to the ground in giggles. Corky was like a child among children, singing, laughing, and playing as he had never done in his entire life. Then it struck him – he jumped into the air at the discovery

that hit him. "I know now," he said, "I know." He ran and picked up the book and said to it, "Where is the Great Land and how do I get there?" He opened the book to the single page and on it were the words, "YOU ARE THERE."

Lady Wisdom calls out to the crowds, to you and to me, "those who listen to me will be secure, without dread," for then you shall know what it is to be wise. May we all find the wisdom to open up the Book, listen, and pay attention.