“***Reveals His Thoughts***” by S. Finlan. The First Church, Nov. 8, 2020

**Wisdom of Solomon 6:12–18**

12 Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. 13 She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. 14 One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gate. . . 16 She goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought. 17 The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, 18 and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality.

**Amos 4:13**

13 For lo, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals, makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth— the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!

The Wisdom of Solomon, which comes not from Solomon himself, but from an anonymous Greek-speaking Jew of the third century b.c., is a great treatise that combines optimistic philosophy with strong moral feeling. The author personifies Wisdom, making her a partner with God, although this may be just a literary convention rather than being meant to be taken as a literal personification. It is very charming how Wisdom hastens to make herself known to anyone who seeks her. She also seeks out people, appears to them, and “meets them in every thought” (6:16). Giving heed to her laws is the secret of immortality (6:18).

This paints a picture of Wisdom as something (or someone) who is attainable and reachable by each one of us. Wisdom responds to our quest, and seeks to teach us everything. Wisdom can even meet us in every thought. It is that line that made me think of the Amos passage. The prophet Amos does not expand upon the idea, but he does speak of God as the one who “reveals his thoughts to mortals” (4:13). It is a surprising message occurring within a very socially-minded prophet who is usually concerned about the injustice going on around him. He is focused on Israel’s contempt for the covenant values of fairness and justice. Usually Amos will say things like this: “Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land. . . [to] make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances. . . I will never forget any of their deeds” (8:4–5, 7). Quite unexpectedly comes this line about God revealing his thoughts to man. It suggests that Amos himself had a powerful inward experience. It finds an echo in the notion that Wisdom can meet us in every thought.

Then, in the New Testament, we get a more complete revelation of an inward experience when we hear the author of Ephesians saying “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . . To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:17, 19). There is an indwelling of Christ and of his love.

The person of faith who is making real spiritual progress experiences a divine indwelling, an inward instructor who imparts wisdom. It is interesting to imagine Amos entering into communion with God and getting messages, and then to imagine the author of Wisdom getting insights while in deep prayer, and then to see the two of them teaching different things. Amos is much more socially confrontational and concerned about cheating and injustice. The author of Wisdom is less confrontational, except when it comes to affirming monotheism. Their messages reflect their unique individual understanding. Even though they both are receiving communications from God, their reception and pronouncement of the communication is mediated through their human minds and their different understanding. Likewise, the author of Ephesians knows some things those two authors don’t know, and will say things that those two couldn’t say. We all are children of God, seeing God with our own understanding. As Paul tells us, “The spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Cor 14:32), that is, subject to their comprehension and interpretation.

We are all interpreters. Even if God is revealing his thoughts to me, I am going to interpret, adapt, and integrate those into my own thinking. We can’t help but shape what we hear. The Bible is written by people who are shaping what they have learned and adapting it to their understanding. Amos understands God to have formed the mountains and created the wind. We learn elsewhere that Amos thinks God caused an earthquake that had recently happened (Amos 9:5).

When it comes to getting messages from God, none of us is a perfect tape recorder. That’s as it should be. The message is meant to enter into our hearts, change our lives, and then be expressed by us as best we are able. We are part of the message. Peter’s experience of having denied Jesus, having been forgiven by Jesus for doing so, and then regaining his courage after receiving the outpoured Spirit, is an essential part of who Peter is as a person and as a preacher. Paul’s experience of having been a persecutor of the church and then having a sudden awakening and a turn toward the Messiah, is essential to who he is, and it becomes a part of his message.

There was a young Irishman who was a skeptic. He thought all cultures made up their mythologies, and the mythology about Yeshua was just another one. But he was an avid reader, including of many theological works, and one day he got on the bus, and as it drove, he thought about two philosophers’ ideas, first Hegel’s concept of the Absolute as the sum of all being and then Berkeley’s concept of Spirit, and by the time he stepped off the bus, he had decided that he believed in God, although he didn’t yet know how to describe the God he believed in. He got on the bus as an atheist, he got off the bus as a believer.

A year later he had a conversation with his friend J. R. R. Tolkein, who challenged him to think more critically about Jesus. That night the Irishman prayed, and decided to accept Jesus. His life was transformed from this moment. This man was C. S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity* and of the Narnia stories. This is a case where the mind lent some assistance to the heart, where philosophy—and a friend—helped to lead someone to faith. *I* certainly wasn’t thinking of Hegel when I had conversion experience.

To a certain degree, all Christian testimony is autobiographical. God is not looking for absolutely passive receptors who will pass on what God is communicating, but wants the message to change us, and wants our changed personalities to become part of the message. That doesn’t mean it’s all about us. We should reflect and be aware of our own psychology, enough to avoid becoming religious egotists or self-proclaimed messiahs. Nor is the message supposed to be an opportunity for self-indulgence. Those out-of-balance aberrations are not what I’m talking about. In fact, if we keep a healthy psychic balance while experiencing life-changing spiritual upheavals, that is a positive part of our testimony.

Amos’ experience also shaped his message. He observed injustice, and it deeply offended him. He would issue warnings: “Seek the Lord and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire” (5:6). Despite his pessimism about the leaders of Israel, Amos did believe that justice is achievable, with a change of will, and a change of values. And so he said “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). This *can* be experienced.

We approach God not only with our hearts but with our minds, and our minds can help our hearts to the truth. Wisdom is trying to reach us and help us. Knowledge can be helpful to faith. The author of Ephesians speaks of our growing into “knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13). This means growing towards having a balanced and Christ-like character.

Growth can often be very painful. Alice Walker wrote, “Some periods of our growth are so confusing that we don’t even recognize that growth is happening. We may feel hostile or angry or weepy . . . Whenever we grow, we tend to feel it, as a young seed must feel the weight and inertia of the earth as it seeks to break out of its shell on its way to becoming a plant. Often the feeling is anything but pleasant. But what is most unpleasant is the not knowing what is happening. . . Those long periods when something inside ourselves seems to be waiting, holding its breath, unsure about what the next step should be, eventually become the periods we wait for, for it is in those periods that we realize that we are being prepared for the next phase of our life and that, in all probability, a new level of the personality is about to be revealed” (from [*Living by the Word*](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/40558)).

The Wisdom of Solomon tells us that Wisdom “hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. . . She goes about seeking those worthy of her” (6:12, 16). What a spiritually optimistic message for today, that God is seeking us out, even if the resultant growth might be painful at times. If we believe that “Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17), then we can experience “the peace of God, which passes all understanding” (Phil 4:7 RSV). God is with us, trying to meet our needs!

So be ready to spend time with yourself, to reflect upon your *own* ideas of God. Are they the same as when you were younger? What happened that caused your concepts of God to change, to deepen? Are you satisfied with your current relationship with God? Would you like to know more, or to *feel* more, of the love of God? God’s message will reach you, wherever you are on the journey of spiritual growth. Know that the power of love is invincible. Set aside some time, pause from your routine, and allow yourself to be receptive to the message of God’s love, mercy, and Wisdom.