

Aristotle is quoted as saying “Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” The getting of wisdom is one of those things that we allude to but don’t often discuss – or maybe we discuss it using different language and concepts.

Today we hear one of the few occasions on a Sunday from the Book of Proverbs – a profound book containing much wisdom. The reading we heard today is not only explicit in its reflection on wisdom, but also explores the feminine nature of wisdom – but it can be a difficult text to swallow. In Proverbs 8, Woman Wisdom looks at the world and sees only the good. She does not speak with the voice of a prophet, condemning those who oppress and ignore the poor and the needy. She does not lament suffering, disease, war, violence, and apathy. She does not protest God's apparent lack of interest in subduing the forces of evil and chaos that threaten to overcome the world. Instead she looks at humanity, the world, and God, and she delights in them all¹. For many over time, the joy of this passage seems almost out of place. But to fully appreciate what is going on here – we need – as always with biblical text to look at it in context.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew part of the bible to seek wisdom is to seek knowledge and understanding of the world and life because the world is permeated with God's wisdom. That process of discovering God's embedded wisdom in the world is crucial for the shaping of a good human life. By examining the workings of the world and reflecting on one's experience in and of it, we are able to discern the will and desire of God more clearly. This passage then highlights that wisdom is not found just in intellectual pursuits, or in passively waiting for discoveries, rather it is the engagement – the living in the midst – it the experiencing – wisdom walks in the midst and is desirable to all. It is wonderful image of wisdom in the midst of relationship. Does this wisdom then bring happiness?

I was listening to a talk during the week on “ TED talks”² . TED talks are a non-for-profit who are committed to sharing ideas (wisdom if you like) they upload really interesting talks on all sorts of topics which are usually about 12 minutes long. They are a great way to hear bits of research and ideas. The one I was listening to, because a friend had recommended it for Trinity Sunday, was on the topic of happiness. It was given by psychiatrist Robert Waldinger – who sighted a recent study of millennials who said that what they aspired to was wealth, success and work focus to make them happy. He then talked about the Harvard Study he had been involved in doing which has tracked a group of men since 1938 and 60 are still being studied. It is one of the longest and most in-depth studies of this kind. They tracked two groups – a group of boys from a poor area of Boston; the second group were in a Harvard as graduate students. All were given base line tests and have been tracked since that time. The group ended up in all walks of life – some did amazing things,

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=596

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzl&feature=youtu.be>

some experienced great pain. What the research showed was that what led to happy and healthy lives in the most part was Good relationships!

The research in a nut shell found that social connections are really good for us – make us physically healthy, mentally healthy and happy; and that Loneliness kills.

Also it's not just any relationship – we can have lots of friends or even be in a long term relationship and still be incredibly lonely (or we may live alone but have many good relationships). It is about the quality of the relationship that makes the difference. Conflict and living in the midst of intense relationships doesn't help us.

It is about satisfaction in relationship – that sustains us – and this can be a buffer to other physical pain we might feel. It doesn't take the pain away, but can sustain mood in pain.

It wasn't that people couldn't argue, but that they could trust.

This is not a new idea – but it is not a quick fix (like pursuit of money or fame)– it takes work and time – a life time.

So why is this of interest on this Sunday when we consider the Trinity?

Well the Trinity is about relationship! It about our interrelationships with God and with one another. The notion of the term trinity emerged in the early church as a way of trying to grapple with a monotheistic belief in one God in light of the early church actual, lived experience of God's activity powerfully in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and after an encounter with the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Trinity provided an answer...of sorts. An answer often couched in the language of fourth-century metaphysics. Not that there's anything wrong with using fourth-century metaphysics to make sense of experience, or twenty-first century either. But somewhere along the way the Trinity became less about describing an experience of the living God and more about accepting metaphysical doctrines and definitions of God. ³.

What the early church, and especially those who had encountered Jesus, are trying to record in the doctrine of the trinity was to express the communal and relational nature of God. We know God, because we know Jesus, we know Jesus through the experience of the spirit. The church for so long has become hung up on the language, rather than embracing the concept and experience. Our faith – our life is about relationship. Wisdom is about engagement with relationship – and surprise – even modern research shows that health and happiness is found in relationship!

Last Sunday we were reminded of the importance of living in the spirit of God and responding to God's call on our lives. Pentecost reminded us to make time to listen to our connectedness to God and see where that might be taking us. Trinity takes this one step further – to recognise that it is not just our connectedness with God

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/05/trinity-c-shh-dont-mention-the-trinity/>

within us, also our relationship in God, and with God and through God with those around us.

This is what this passage from John's Gospel is trying to help us to understand today. Jesus explains there are things we can't bear, things we won't remember, things that will be hard to hold on to – but this doesn't matter – because the relationship in Jesus does not end in Jesus death. Since the Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus, and since what belongs to Jesus belongs to God, then even in Jesus's absence God's revelation to the world and to the church is still available -- through the Spirit⁴.

As we can see in John 16:12-15, the Fourth Gospel's particular understanding of the Spirit recognizes two realities about how Christianity relates to its past and future. The first is that the revelation that took place in and through Jesus is fundamental for Christian identity. The second is that, as fundamental and eternal as Jesus' revelation is for Christians, the world will keep turning from the time that revelation first made itself known. The church in John's day, today, and always finds itself trying to understand and live its faith in the midst of social, cultural, and global circumstances that change rapidly. But we constantly have our relationship with God – our interrelationships with God and each other to help us make sense of this.

So what wisdom do we take from this?

One of the things which the Harvard research showed was that positive and healthy relationships were ones which could be relied upon and trusted. Ones that could be honest. Proverbs, talks about wisdom being realised as we walk amongst one another, engaging – trusting. In our faith relationship we are called to be dependent on the Spirit and dependent on each other, because the Spirit so often speaks to us through the person and words of those around us.⁵ In a sense we grow through relationship and dialogue.

David Lose suggests that being a Trinitarian community is a community striving to be a place that knows it doesn't have all the answers, and so consequently makes space for conversation and values those who are bring different voices and experiences into its midst. Conversation, valuing difference, being inclusive – these things aren't easy, but genuine community, while challenging, is also creative, productive, and enriching – a solid relationship in which we find wisdom about God and ourselves.

Trinity Sunday invites us to remember the relationship which we are called to be part of – knowing God within ourselves and each other – and daring to see where

⁴ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2856

⁵ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/05/trinity-c-shh-dont-mention-the-trinity/>

that might take us. Or as proverbs encourages us to remember “*rejoicing before God always, rejoicing in God’s inhabited world and delighting in the human race*”⁶. Amen

⁶ Proverbs 8: 30-31