

Lady Wisdom Calls Out

8 ¹⁻¹¹ Do you hear Lady Wisdom calling?

Can you hear Madame Insight raising her voice?
She's taken her stand at First and Main,
at the busiest intersection.

Right in the city square
where the traffic is thickest, she shouts,
"You—I'm talking to all of you,
everyone out here on the streets!

Listen, you idiots—learn good sense!

You blockheads—shape up!

Don't miss a word of this—I'm telling you how to live well,
I'm telling you how to live at your best.

My mouth chews and savors and relishes truth—
I can't stand the taste of evil!

You'll only hear true and right words from my mouth;
not one syllable will be twisted or skewed.

You'll recognize this as true—you with open minds;
truth-ready minds will see it at once.

Prefer my life-disciplines over chasing after money,
and God-knowledge over a lucrative career.

For Wisdom is better than all the trappings of wealth;
nothing you could wish for holds a candle to her.

¹²⁻²¹ "I am Lady Wisdom, and I live next to Sanity;
Knowledge and Discretion live just down the street.

The Fear-of-GOD means hating Evil,
whose ways I hate with a passion—
pride and arrogance and crooked talk.

Good counsel and common sense are my characteristics;
I am both Insight and the Virtue to live it out.

With my help, leaders rule,
and lawmakers legislate fairly;

With my help, governors govern,
along with all in legitimate authority.

I love those who love me;
those who look for me find me.
Wealth and Glory accompany me—
also substantial Honor and a Good Name.
My benefits are worth more than a big salary, even a *very* big salary;
the returns on me exceed any imaginable bonus.
You can find me on Righteous Road—that's where I walk—
at the intersection of Justice Avenue,
Handing out life to those who love me,
filling their arms with life—armloads of life!

Hearing about beloved biblical scholar Eugene Peterson's death last month, I've been reading from his biblical translation "The Message" a little more frequently. His knack for language gives us a glimpse into his affection for this feminine personification of wisdom and understanding from Proverbs 8, or as he calls her, "Lady Wisdom" or "Madame Insight." She shows up in the crossroads in every town. She resides in the courts of Kings and guides political rulers. She was present with God at the beginning of Creation. And whoever finds her finds life, but whoever misses her injures themselves, and those who hate wisdom love death. It's a great personification of the marks of wisdom on human life. It's worth pause and reflection on when and where we notice wisdom in our own time. Does wisdom show up in the Center of the Universe? Do we detect her phrasing in public policy? Is she still brooding over Creation? Do we care about cultivating the presence of wisdom and understanding in our own lives?

It may seem a stretch in the polarization and division of our world when sound bites deafen our ears to instead seek wisdom, to expect her to help the leaders in our world to decree what is just and to govern rightly. And yet, I hope that we continue to love wisdom and seek her guidance for our common life together on this planet, in our national life, and in our towns. It isn't easy. It isn't easy to go that deep or to care that much. Wisdom tends to be rather demanding of us, and yet knowing her is the greatest reward of all. She promises that seeking her gifts will be better any day than chasing after money or grabbing after power.

Woman Wisdom is not partisan; she's not casting an American ballot. That's not her style. And yet, she calls to us to be discerning in our own political lives, knowing that the one affects the many, and the many can affect the one. She demands truth-telling in the public square. She steers us away from evil. She knows that pride and arrogance are not leadership traits. Rather, they can be the downfall of the powerful and powerless alike. Good counsel and common sense are her

characteristics. I love this line the best from Peterson's interpretation, "I am both Insight and the Virtue to live it out." Insight and the virtue to live it out. Wow.

Not only does wisdom invite us to see the bigger picture, she expects us to live into our values with moral courage. I would add that she precedes Christ and echoes the voices of the prophets in calling us to compassion and justice. This text also places her at her own crossroads, standing at the intersection of Righteous Road and Justice Avenue. She is both respect for tradition and the creative force of innovation. Her calling is not now, nor has it ever been to a side, no matter how well thought out that platform happens to be. No, she calls us always to the better versions of ourselves. To follow the path of wisdom is to walk the same road and to learn the same lessons that Jesus taught to his disciples. And even though we have ballots to cast and choices to make, the path of wisdom is opened by invitation only. In case you hadn't noticed, you can't make someone else wise, not with power or money, not with grit or hard work. You can't make someone wise by the power of a good argument or through the emotional manipulation of a well-placed ad. You can only choose whether or not you, you personally, are going to befriend her and let her ways become your ways.

So as we wake up tomorrow to another election day, a time of exercising our right to choose those law-makers and governors, let us pray for wisdom to guide us, not only in how we vote, but how we choose to live our lives, and use our words. Let us pray for those elected officials to listen to the help that wisdom is whispering in their ears. Let us pray for wisdom to reside at the crossroads of our town, where England Street meets the railroad tracks. Let wisdom echo through the campus of Randolph Macon College speaking even more boldly than the greatest body of knowledge. May her call be heard in our churches, and her creative spirit be found languishing in our surrounding farms and open spaces. May we befriend woman wisdom and

acknowledge her gifts that affirm life. And then, let us soak in Jesus' own words of wisdom when he told his followers, "I came that they may have life, and have it in abundance." Abundant life for all. That's wisdom. That's truth. That's the dream. May it be so. Amen.