

*Common Worship in Separate Places  
For the people of Elmwood Avenue Presbyterian Church  
London, Ontario  
and their friends*

*The 16th Sunday after Pentecost  
12 September 2021*

*To cross the threshold into worship, light a candle and keep a moment of silence.*

*Opening Words*

L: O Lord, let the light of your face shine upon us,

**P: and put your gladness in our hearts.**

L: Let us worship God.

*Prayers of Adoration and Confession*

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, for we come to worship and adore you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our one true and living God.

Merciful One, into the peace of your presence we bring our restless lives, and we confess our brokenness and need. Deliver us from envy of others and our secret self-loathing. Make us patient with each other and truthful about ourselves, that we may become true to you. Light the lamp of wisdom in our hearts, and guide us in the way we should go.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

**P: Christ, have mercy upon us.**

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

God of Wisdom, open our eyes to recognise Jesus Christ. Then gather us again to yourself and bring us into your presence, that we may be renewed and refreshed in body and soul; through Christ Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*

*An Assurance of Pardon*

L: "With the Lord there is mercy, and plenteous redemption." May God grant us pardon, true repentance, and bring us to eternal life.

**P: May the peace of Christ be with us all.**

*Prayer for Illumination* Holy One, guide us in the deep things of your heavenly wisdom, and lead us by your Word to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen*

*The Psalm for the Day*

**Psalm 19** (*Praise for God's Law*)

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.  
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,  
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,  
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.  
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them;  
and nothing is hidden from its heat.  
The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the Lord are sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;  
the fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring for ever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey,  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
Moreover by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

But who can detect their errors?  
 Clear me from hidden faults.  
 Keep back your servant also from the insolent;  
 do not let them have dominion over me.  
 Then I shall be blameless,  
 and innocent of great transgression.  
 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
 be acceptable to you,  
 O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

*(Said together)* **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen**

### *A Reading for the Day*

#### **Proverbs 1: 20-33** *(The Call of Wisdom)*

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.'

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: **Thanks be to God.**

### *Some thoughts on the Reading*

**Proverbs 1:20** *"Wisdom cries out in the streets; in the squares she raises her voice."*

Some people can rattle off names, dates, and facts. They win at Trivial Pursuit. They spew out facts like they're pieces of a puzzle dumped on the table. They know each piece, but do they know how they all fit together? "Just the facts," said the detective on Dragnet. His first job was to *inform* himself, to gather up all the pieces of the puzzle. But if someone asked, "Is this what the Bible means by Wisdom, is it gathering a jumble of puzzle pieces?", we'd have to say, 'no', that's not Wisdom.

But good detectives do more. They discover how each piece of the puzzle can be made to fit into one, big picture. That's what a 'theory' is. A theory makes sense of disjointed facts and random bits of information. It links them together, making one, big picture. So, we might ask, "Is this what the Bible means by Wisdom? Is it *theoretical* knowledge?", again, we'd have to say, 'no', that's not Wisdom.

In the Bible, Wisdom is more than a jumble of facts turned into a theory, more than information turned into knowledge. Wisdom is knowledge turned into a *way of life*.

Here's a trivial example. We may know which key on the piano is called 'middle C', and which ones are E and G. Those are bits of information. But if we also know that, when you play them together, they make a C major chord, that's a bit of knowledge, a bit of music theory. But Wisdom asks, "Can you *play* the piano?" Wisdom is not just knowing. It's knowing how to play. And more. It's knowing how to work and live.

In the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom appears as a woman. In Greek, her name is Sophia. There's an ancient Church called 'Hagia Sophia' (which means 'Holy Wisdom'). It's in Constantinople, except it's a Mosque now, and the city is called Istanbul.

Like that ancient Church, Wisdom takes her place in the centre of the city, where people bustle about, buying and selling and living together. She shouts. "Wisdom cries out in the street," says Proverbs. "In the squares she raises her voice." She shouts

because she's not listened to. Do you remember Helen Reddy singing, "I am woman, hear me roar..."? (I do, *barely*.) "Yes, I am wise, but it's wisdom born of pain. Yes, I've paid the price, but look how much I've gained," she sang.

To be wise, in the Biblical sense, is not just to live well. It's to live God's *will*, revealed in God's Law. "The Law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul...it rejoices the heart," says Psalm 19. Really to know the Law is to *feel* it alive in our souls and embodied in our lives. It's embodied in Nature, too, in the very 'order of things', in their regularity and reliability. "God set a pavilion for the sun," says the Psalmist. "It goes forth from the edge of the heavens and runs to the end of it again." Sunrise, sunset.

Every domain of life has its own order, its own logical ways. Wise carpenters care for their tools. They keep their saw blades sharp and respect them for what they can do when they're used wisely, and for the harm they can do when they're not. The same is true when we're cooking or driving a car. There's a 'stupid way' and a 'wise way' in every field of life. The 'wise way' obeys the *order* that's built into everything.

Here's a silly example. A sergeant in charge of a firing squad must shout the commands in the proper *order*. It's 'ready, aim, *fire*', not 'ready, fire, *aim*'. There's no point in aiming after you've fired. The first way follows a logical order. It's wise. The second way is not.

What if we gathered up every domain of life, each with its own way of living well, and looked upon them as one big picture? What Wisdom do they share, seen from the highest vantage point, from a God's-eye view? Or we could ask it this way: What does it mean to live well in any circumstance, wherever we find ourselves? Proverbs puts it this way: "The fear of the Lord" – 'fear' means 'respect' here. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom." More than respect for the order of things, the highest Wisdom is respect for the *Orderer* himself.

But this is exactly why Wisdom shouts like a doomsday prophet in the Book of Proverbs. She shouts, not because she can't be understood, but because she's not listened to. The fear and respect that's owed her Sovereign Majesty has gone. She's scoffed at, belittled, and ignored. Because no one takes her seriously, her cry becomes a complaint, and the complaint turns into a warning, and the warning turns into a judgment against them. Forlorn and frustrated, she can do nothing more for them now but watch the disaster unfold.

Climate scientists know this feeling. They tell us what's wrong, but we will not change how we live. Holy Wisdom must see us as a selfish generation. We won't restrain our desire and go without, will we? Wealth is deaf to the wisdom of self-sacrifice. When the last ounce of oil has been pumped from the ground and spewed from the exhaust pipes of our SUVs, and the whole earth is aflame, Wisdom will watch our disaster unfold, and say, "It's too late. I can't help you now."

"They shall eat the fruit of their way, and be sated with their own devices," says Proverbs, "because they did not choose the fear of the Lord."

I know what you're thinking because I am too. "Where's the Gospel in this? We thought the Gospel was the Good News of God's rescue in our plight. God does something for us that we cannot do ourselves. Isn't *God* supposed to love and forgive and help and save us?"

You have a point. The Gospel *is* God's doing, not ours. But the Gospel doesn't leave us with nothing to do. It opens a new path to follow – 'the way, the truth, the life'. And the freedom given us by the Gospel was never freedom from the consequences of our choices. "What does it profit to gain the whole world and lose your integrity, your soul, your very *self* in the bargain," said Jesus. Answer? *Nothing*.

He embodied God's Wisdom. He lived God's Will, gathering it into one big picture. In the end, no one wanted to hear him. He was killed for what he said and how he lived. But God raised him, as if to say, "Look. He's not going away." And that, *that* is the Gospel's Good News. We're wise when we hear and turn and follow him.

### ***Prayers of Intercession***

Holy One, you have spoken your Word of Wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ, In him we find your truth, the way to your goodness, and a new life to live in him. To those who suffer quietly in pain, bring healing; wherever there is strife, bring peace; and bring us all to abundant life.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, you call your Church to shine as light in the darkness. Bless and strengthen your Church's witness. Enlarge our faith to fill the empty spaces in our lives. Strengthen our hearts in the worship of your majestic love, and inspire us to reach the neighbour in need of your truth and love.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy Lord, you are the source of all healing and comfort. We pray for those who are unhappy in their lives. Hear the prayers of those who cry to you in the darkest hours of the night, and shine the light of your presence on those who live in the shadow of death.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Loving God, light the lamp of wisdom in our hearts. Guard us in our speaking and listening. Keep us from hasty words, mean accusations, and disregard for truth spoken in love.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for peace in our land and in our hearts. Let your justice make demands upon us. Revive communities everywhere, and heal our relations with each other, with the earth, and with you.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Creator and Lord of all, we praise you for the wisdom you reveal in our knowledge of nature. Bless and prosper the careful work of scientists. Grant us wisdom to use their discoveries for the welfare of all, for the healing of the earth, and for the glory of your name.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We give thanks for those who have died in the faith, those remembered especially by us, and those remembered by no one but you. Grant that we may come to share with them the joy and peace of life everlasting...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Faithful God, you sent us your Word as the sun of truth and justice to shine upon all the world. Open our eyes to see your glory in your works, that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness.

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever. Amen**

### ***Benediction***

*(Said together)* **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen**