

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – November 12, 2017
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-20

FOR REFLECTION

“Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.”

- Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President of the U.S. (1743-1826)

In 1800, Jefferson and Aaron Burr received an equal number of electoral votes. As a result, the outgoing members of Congress were called upon to choose the United States' third president. Alexander Hamilton was instrumental in convincing Congress to choose Jefferson over Burr.

Wooing Wisdom

My first reaction to this text was rather negative. With all the sexual misconduct revelations in Hollywood (which only mirror the sexual misconduct revealed in the church – and continue to be revealed in politics) – my first thought was, “Great. Here’s an ancient sexualizing of the female aspect of G-d. She’s a flirt and a floozie, and makes herself available to anyone interested in 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.

After the Alabama state auditor, Jim Zeigler, equated Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore’s sexual encounter with a 14-year-old with the relationship between Joseph (an adult) and Mary (a presumed teenager), I was ready to chuck this text into the fire with the rest of the biblical accounts of justified rape and revenge and abuse.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/11/09/alabama-state-official-defends-roy-moore-citing-joseph-and-mary-they-became-parents-of-jesus/?utm_term=.04f5628468d5

But reading on, my thoughts shifted:

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, 19 and immortality brings one near to God...

There is actual respect for this woman – for her as an instructor and a lawyer – and her proximity to G-d. So, I dug deeper to find out what this (presumably male) guy was saying.

King Solomon didn’t write this book. The author, let’s call him Sol/Saul, wrote this in lyrical Greek about 30 years before Jesus was born. He is believed to have been a Hellenized Jew living in Alexandria, Egypt – a northern seaside port – after its conquest by Rome. Earlier hopes for social and cultural acceptance by the Egyptians

and Greeks have led to disappointment – and, here, a complete break. So, much of this book is a condemnation of pagan idolatry and crimes of corruption.

Sol/Saul has also had a deeply mystical experience that has filled him with divine presence. His union with *Sophia* (Greek for Wisdom) is passionate AND intellectual. It is an experience open to all who follow his example.

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.

Wisdom is willing to be wooed and sought after by anyone – and she seeks out those who are worthy of her. But this particular text isn't addressed to just anyone. The chapter begins with these words:

1 Listen therefore, O kings, and understand;
learn, O judges of the ends of the earth.

2 Give ear, you that rule over multitudes,
and boast of many nations...

6 For the lowliest may be pardoned in mercy,
but the mighty will be mightily tested.

7 For the Lord of all will not stand in awe of anyone,
or show deference to greatness;
because he himself made both small and great,
and he takes thought for all alike.

8 But a strict inquiry is in store for the mighty.

9 To you then, O monarchs, my words are directed,
so that you may learn wisdom and not transgress.

The phrase “judges of the ends of the earth” refers to the spreading power of the Roman empire. This is a call to the ruling classes to remember that G-d is the ultimate ruler. And G-d created everyone, not just them. So wise up and shape up – find some new role models – like King Solomon – like our Saul here – who live in the light of Woman Wisdom. Understand that G-d is the last presiding judge – and you're going to want *Sophia* as a character witness.

This text is addressed to the three American men who own more wealth than the bottom 50% of Americans. It is addressed to the 400 richest individuals who now own more wealth than the bottom 64% of the population.

https://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/11/08/three-richest-americans-now-own-more-wealth-bottom-half-us-combined-report?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=socialnetwork

This text is addressed to the current administration and congress who are working overtime to consolidate the rest of the country's resources into the hands of those who already have too much.

And in light of their disdain for women – *Sophia* is a perfect metaphor for the corrective voice in our time and place. Women who are finally able to voice their experiences of being victimized by powerful men – finding courage in solidarity – are bringing the powerful down. Men are actually frightened, calling this a witch-hunt – something men did to single, self-sustaining women centuries ago – predators finally on trial for actual crimes.

And if we look at poverty rates in this country:

Women in America are more likely to be poor than men. Over half of the 37 million Americans living in poverty [a decade ago] are women. [Rates have risen.] And women in America are further behind than women in other countries—the gap in poverty rates between men and women is wider in America than anywhere else in the Western world.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2008/10/08/5103/the-straight-facts-on-women-in-poverty/>

[In 2015] Nationwide, 15.5 percent of women live in poverty, compared with 11.9 percent of men. But the discrepancy in poverty rates worsens when considering race.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/women-are-poorer-than-men-in-every-state>

Women – especially women of color – will be the worst nightmare of the current ruling classes. But there are others who will also be going after the rulers and judges of the earth:

As "the elite ranks of our billionaire class continue to pull apart from the rest of us," ... many Americans—including students saddled with loan debt, workers suffering from stagnant wages, and families who have seen "their wealth and savings evaporate"—are revolting against the system that allowed the richest to accumulate such wealth at the expense of so many.

"A century ago, a similar anti-inequality upsurge took on America's vastly unequal distribution of income and wealth and, over the course of little more than a generation, fashioned a much more equal America," [researchers] conclude. "We can do the same."

https://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/11/08/three-richest-americans-now-own-more-wealth-bottom-half-us-combined-report?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=socialnetwork

As we traverse this mine field of modern social realities, we are best reminded that:

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, 19 and immortality brings one near to God; 20 so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

And that "kingdom" has nothing to do with earthly possessions.

Let us be open to instruction and seek Wisdom daily.

Let us pray that those in power may do likewise – before it's too late.

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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, 19 and immortality brings one near to God; 20 so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.