

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost – September 16, 2018
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister
Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-8:1

FOR REFLECTION

"Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light."

~ Helen Keller, American author, political activist, and lecturer (1880-1968)

Friends of God

Alexandria is a Mediterranean port city in Egypt. During the Hellenistic period (323 bce-323 bce) as the Roman Empire emerged, it was home to a lighthouse ranking among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World as well as a spectacular library.

The first century Jewish community in Alexandria was under constant threat of persecution by the Romans. And it is in this context that the Wisdom of Solomon was written – in a deeply poetic Greek – by a single author.

Sophia, Woman Wisdom, strides across this book with divine power and brilliance. She not only outshines the Alexandrian lighthouse, she outshines the moon and sun and stars. She has many names – including Logos – meaning “word” and “speech” and “reason” – reaching beyond the unimaginable collection of human wisdom in the Alexandrian library.

Her strength and characteristics echo those of Isis, the ultimate and most powerful Egyptian Mother Goddess, the feminine archetype for creation...

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isis>

She is and isn't God – just as Christians describe Jesus as both God and Human, Logos and Messiah. Wisdom is a companion of God, an emanation of God, defender of God and God's value system.

27 Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; **in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God**, and prophets; 28 for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

**“...in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God...”**

Not subjects, not slaves, not intercessors or judges or children or sole beneficiaries – but FRIENDS of God. The Quaker community is called the Society of Friends – meaning they like each other – but more acutely they are friends of God – listening constantly for the Word and Wisdom of the divine to guide their actions.

It is likely that this concept of being friends of God is at the heart of mystic Judaism and progressive Christian belief that we are partners with God in repairing creation. We are God's hands in the world – sharing the risks and profits and outcomes of a mutual endeavor. This does away with hierarchy and imagines egalitarian relationships – divine-human included.

Friends enjoy each other's company, offer aid in times of crisis, help to raise each other's children, hang out and do nothing together, pitch in and help with projects, eat together, share a similar value system or ethic, inspire and hopefully act as role models for one another. It is a relationship built on trust and free will, chance and choice. And true friends, no matter how far apart they may seem, come together again as if no time has passed – picking up where they left off – connected in unseen ways.

Of course, we have have the modern definition of "friend" to contend with – the concept of a Facebook friend. Facebook takes the idea of "befriending" – renames it "friending" – and allows for "un-friending" or "de-friending" if such action is needed. In this context we don't even have to know someone in real life to be friends on Facebook. And Facebook "friends" who may be acquaintances or even strangers have been known to do very un-friend-like things to other people.

A t.v. show that is scheduled to start on CBS at the end of September has an interesting twist on both the "friends of God" concept and the Facebook Friend concept. Here's their description:

"God Friend Me" is a humorous, uplifting drama about an outspoken atheist whose life is turned upside down when he receives a friend request on social media from God and unwittingly becomes an agent of change in the lives and destinies of others around him. Miles Finer is intelligent, hopeful and optimistic, but he doesn't believe in God. This puts him at odds with his father, Reverend Arthur Finer, a beloved preacher at Harlem's Trinity Church for 25 years who is stung by his son's strong rejection of his faith. Miles feels he's found his purpose in life hosting a podcast where he's free to speak his mind, but that changes when he receives the ultimate friend request. **After repeated pokes by God, Miles' curiosity takes over, and he accepts the request and follows the signs to Cara Bloom, an online journalist suffering from writer's block. Brought together by the "God Account," the two find themselves investigating God's friend suggestions and inadvertently helping others in need.** Joining them on their journey are Miles's supportive sister, Ali, a doctoral psych student by day and bartender by night, and his best friend, Rakesh, a sometime hacker who helps Miles and Cara research the enigmatic account. **Miles is set on getting to the bottom of what he believes is an elaborate hoax, but in the meantime he'll play along and, in the process, change his life forever.**

<https://www.cbs.com/shows/god-friended-me/about/>

When I heard about this, I was pretty sure this was another schmaltzy “Highway to Heaven” Christian vehicle for conversion. But the producers say otherwise:

...good news, *all you other religious denominations* — this "god" in “God Friended Me” is all gods, according to the producers of the show. "When we say 'god,' it's the general — we're not focusing on one religious figure or portrayal...In the cast, Violet [Beane]'s character is Jewish, Miles (Hall) is an atheist, Suraj [Sharma] is Hindu."

"It's incredibly important to us that we're not preachy or judgmental. We're not here to take sides, we're here to show all points of views," executive producer Steven Lilien said. "It's an inclusive show, a respectful show, whether you believe or not. Our message is more about believing in each other..."

And in case you were wondering, the question of whether an opposing powerful force came up, but producers wouldn't say if one would be in the show. But they did offer up this one bit of information.

"The devil would probably be on Twitter..."

<https://www.tvguide.com/news/god-friended-me-god-catholic-christian-cbs/>

That idea alone makes me want to watch!

I do think that the concept is a good one – as the Facebook-God-friend's posts lead to helping others rather than judging or converting others.

I'm meeting with two of our new teens once a month in a Confirmation Class – more like experiment – to find creative ways to understand and be connected to this church, it's history and values and mission. Immediately we decided to post insights and inspirational photos on Instagram. (Please feel free to send a follow request to Mt. Hollywood.) We are keeping journals online, and will be creating audio interviews and video stories to share with the congregation. We want the class itself to be a force for good in the world – to reflect a developing friendship with God.

If you have other ideas about how to share your and our friendship with God in creative ways, please – communicate that idea, create it, do it, be it. The world is in deep need of positive connection – divine intervention – true friendship – and healing partnership.

It starts here – where Woman Wisdom strides across our hearts – and makes us Friends of God.

Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-8:1 (NRSV)

26 For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. 27 Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; **in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God**, and prophets; 28 for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom. 29 She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, 30 for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

8:1 She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.