

**Wisdom in the Information Age**      **Trinity UC, Vernon**  
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The reading we heard from the Book of Proverbs earlier is one of many passages in that book where Wisdom speaks, entreats, offers guidance. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible there are other writings that, all together, are called Wisdom Literature. Five books in what we call the Old Testament: The Book of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) are all part of the Wisdom Literature, as are the Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Sirach) in the Apocrypha.

Holy Wisdom, or Hagia Sophia as she is called in Greek, claims her status alongside Yahweh from the very beginning of creation. In Christian theology, she has been identified with “The Word” or the Christ, and the Advocate or Holy Spirit. In the Book of Proverbs, Holy Wisdom speaks with her own voice. She entreats the people – and us – time and again to listen and learn from her. She calls to the people to put aside foolishness and follow in her way.

The feminine embodiment of wisdom is part of traditions much more ancient than Judeo-Christianity. It is connected to the Goddesses in earlier matriarchal and matrifocal societies and religions. The Egyptians had Ma’at, the Greeks had Metis, Hestia, Hecate, and, before she was demonized, Medusa, all of whom represented various aspects of wisdom.

These names may not be familiar to you. As matriarchies were displaced by patriarchies, the names I mentioned were diminished or forgotten altogether, but they stood, in their times, as personifications of wisdom: practical wisdom; spiritual and mystical wisdom; a discerning combination of intuition, intellect, and experience; a seasoned maturity, and; learning through humility and vulnerability.

Wisdom begs our consideration now, perhaps more than at any other time in our human history. We are at a point where we “know” more than we ever have – about ourselves, about the earth and about the cosmos. However, knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing - they are related, yes, but they are not the same.

That difference is partially explained in a modern poem by Zachary Zuccaro, a young American poet. His poem is called, simply, “Wisdom and Knowledge”:

Much emphasis is placed on knowledge and memory,  
intelligence is worshipped and information is [humanity’s]  
god.

Yet these two are trivial and shall turn to dust...  
What is immortal, and is important  
does not age, does not die, and is rarely sought.

Wisdom and love are the fruit of the soul  
and these do not age but grow with time.

Yet these treasures are ignored and mocked.

Many people believe they possess wisdom,  
yet they do not seek it.  
Many covet love, and wish it for themselves,  
yet are reluctant to give it,  
sharing it only with close friends and family.

Wisdom and love are the food of the soul  
yet people stuff their souls with hatred and ignorance,  
and while their bodies live healthy and well,  
souls suffer and starve.

Wisdom, as the poem suggests, is beyond “knowing”; in fact, wisdom is, in part at least, the humility of not knowing – of knowing that we don’t know, if you will.  
And wisdom is not a gift – it is, as Holy Wisdom tells us in the Book of Proverbs, a task, a lifelong task. It is something we are to seek

after; it is something we gain through entering into life with everything we have, including and especially our critical thinking skills.

Benedictine Sister, writer and speaker Joan Chittister said:

“Wisdom is not life lived wrapped in marshmallow and indifferent to the reality within us. Wisdom is not the fine art of serene oblivion. Wisdom is life peeled and cored, it is attention and consciousness lived to the hilt.”

In this age of bombardment by social media, through soundbites, through Facebook posts from unvetted sources, we need to seek wisdom with ever more energy and attention. This era has been called “The Age of Information” but it can as easily be called the age of disinformation and misinformation. We need to be discerning about what we hear and see.

There’s a CBC radio programme called “The Age of Persuasion” with host Terry O’Reilly that exposes the depth and breadth of the persuasive messages that we have been getting for over a hundred years from interests that want to shape how we think, feel and act – messages that we don’t always reflect on to suss out the wisdom or lack thereof in what we’re hearing. Slogans such as “You’re worth it” are designed to encourage us to focus our attention, care and energy on ourselves, to the exclusion of others. That is the mindset that fuels the heinous protests outside hospitals, that sees vaccination as a “freedom” issue without ever reflecting deeply on what that means.

In this particular time, Wisdom/Sophia calls us to hone the ability to sift through what we read and hear, to think critically about the sources and what the vested interests of those sources are. In this time of pandemic, of climate crisis, and of balkanization (that is, of dividing ourselves into groups that become hostile to or uncooperative with each other), cultivating and seeking after wisdom is crucial. It is crucial to fostering caring attitudes

towards each other, to the flourishing of humankind and to all of the earth and its creatures.

The past year and a half have provided more unstructured time than any of us could have foreseen: more time for thought about the meaning of our life, more time for reflection, for feeling our joys and sorrows, our questions and our fears. We have had to deal with things we never anticipated. In all of that, being thoughtful and discerning of what we see, hear and do is to call on Holy Wisdom to guide, teach and lead us.

Paul Tillich, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Protestant theologian, wrote:

“Wisdom is ... insight into the meaning of one’s life, into its conflicts and dangers, into its creative and destructive powers, and into the ground out of which it comes and to which it must return.”

Joan Chittister goes on to say:

“Wisdom is clearly not apathy masquerading as patience. On the contrary, with wisdom comes the obligation to deal with life head on, head up, with open eyes and an honest heart and courageous conviction.”

If we embrace the mysterious notion that Wisdom was there, at the beginning, with the Creator, moving in the cosmos and forming life out of a formless void, then Wisdom is embodied in all parts of the universe. She can be sought in all the corners of our own lives and in all parts of life itself.

Seeking wisdom in this day and age means intimately connecting to our center, “the place in each of us that is still, calm, quiet, and connected. The place we can trust that connects the body, mind, heart, and soul.” It also means bringing a critical mind to the continuous flow of what passes for information in this world. It means doing due diligence around sources of information, hidden agendas, persuasive powers.

Ironically, Divine Wisdom does not keep us from making mistakes – in fact, wisdom is often found *through* those mistakes.

For those who live their life seeking Divine Wisdom there is never a shortage! It is an abundant feast! There is always more to learn, no matter how old we get. Be wary of anyone who thinks they have it all figured out!

Wisdom, if we choose to seek her – will never let us stagnate. Wisdom will keep leading us on until we have learned whatever it is we need to learn next.

If you are 25 – 30 – 40 – 50 – 60 – And yes, even 80 or 90 and think you have seen and heard it all...Wisdom continues to invite you to seek her – she has more to teach us yet.

I leave you with this thought-provoking quote, “Holy One, what is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?” The disciple asked. And the Holy One answered: “When you seek knowledge, you use a torch to show the way. When you seek wisdom==, you become the torch.”