

Proverbs 1: 20-23 (CEB) –

Wisdom shouts in the street; in the public square she raises her voice.

Above the noisy crowd, she calls out.

At the entrances of the city gates, she has her say:

“How long will you clueless people love your naiveté,

Mockers hold their mocking dear, and fools hate knowledge?

You should respond when I correct you.

Look, I'll pour out my spirit on you. I'll reveal my words to you.”

Finding a Word: Listening to the Texts

There's a story about a proud young man who came to Socrates asking for knowledge. He walked up to the muscular philosopher and said, "O great Socrates, I come to you for knowledge." Socrates recognized a pompous numbskull when he saw one. He led the young man through the streets, to the sea, and chest deep into water. Then he asked, "What do you want?"

"Knowledge, O wise Socrates," said the young man with a smile. Socrates put his strong hands on the man's shoulders and pushed him under. Thirty seconds later Socrates let him up. "What do you want?" he asked again. "Wisdom," the young man sputtered, "O great and wise Socrates."

Socrates crunched him under again. Thirty seconds passed, thirty-five. Forty. Socrates let him up. The man was gasping. "What do you want, young man?" Between heavy, heaving breaths the fellow wheezed, "Knowledge, O wise and wonderful..." Socrates jammed him under again. Forty seconds passed. Fifty. "What do you want?" "Air!" the young man screeched. "I need air!"

"When you want knowledge as you have just wanted air, then you will have knowledge."¹

A little over a year ago, Bishop Webb first spoke to me about the possibility of becoming a pastor here at Kenmore UMC, he stated that KUMC likely has the most effective adult education ministry in the Upper New York Conference. From your church profile, he began to list the adult Sunday School Classes, seasonal study groups, UMW circles, and adults engaged in mission. He mentioned that this congregation has a great appreciation for learning opportunities, and develops life-long learners. I have certainly found that to be true!

Seeking and gaining knowledge is very important to many of us here. And when that knowledge is considered in partnership with life experience, we have the opportunity to gain WISDOM! Wisdom entails knowing that goes beyond knowledge and portrays an identity based on internalizing past and present, and even one's anticipated future.

On October 1, 1996 a book called *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks made its debut. Almost ten years later, the movie adaptation came out with the story coming to life through actors Rachel McAdams, Ryan Gosling, and James Garner. The story is about an elderly

couple that is dealing with the wife's advancing Alzheimer's disease. She lives in an assisted care facility and her husband visits her regularly, always with a notebook in hand. What the story reveals, through a series of flashbacks to when they were young, is that the husband is reading, from his notebook, their love story. Over and over again he reads their love story from that notebook, in hopes that his wife will remember some of it one day. It is a sweet, poignant story that those of us who have experienced loved ones with Alzheimer's or dementia can certainly relate to.

The wife in the story does not remember who she is and so the husband keeps reminding her. He tells her who she is and who they are together. Their story is important, not only to her, but to him. It gives him meaning and purpose in the midst of tragic circumstances.

How often do we need to be reminded of our own stories? Our identity? Our faith history? Our calling to be followers of Jesus? Our collective, anticipated future? As we continue to grow and change as people faced with a variety of circumstances, we can lose sight of our true selves, and need to be reminded. This happens in all aspects of our lives, including our faith.

Common to this time of the year, we find a Lenten text from Mark 8:27-38. Here Jesus teaches his disciples that he must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts of his time. Then he will be killed and after three days, rise from the dead. Jesus knows his own story and he does not make excuses for it. In fact, in the Greco-Roman world, fore-knowledge of one's own death was a sign of wisdom, or of someone with great powers to see and know the future. Jesus is matter of fact about his story because he is focused on serving God and remaining faithful to his purpose. Jesus has knowledge of the Jewish faith, and of the experience of human life, AND that does not deter him from obedience to God and the wisdom to understand his identity within God's story.

Later, he asks his disciples, the crowd, and ultimately us, two very important questions that the *Common English Bible* puts this way, "Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives?" Another way to understand it we find in *The Message*, "What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?" These are remarkable questions. Jesus wants to know our stories. And the answers to these questions reveal who we truly are and what we believe about our stories.

Those answers also reveal who we believe Jesus is. Do we believe in the story that he tells—the Jesus that Peter says is the Messiah? Do we believe in the Jesus that will be rejected by so many and left to die on a cross, only to be resurrected? Do we believe all of these stories? Do we believe in the ministry of suffering and self-sacrifice? It's a tough one. Either Jesus is crazy, or what he says is true. This is the wisdom of our very lives.

In your own life, when Jesus looks at you and asks, "Who do you say that I am?" How do you respond? When a friend or neighbor or colleague asks, "Are you a Christian?" What story do you tell?

The Gospel today has an interesting interpretation in *The Message*. Jesus says, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how." This is clearly a different message than what we hear from the world around us and from our human

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nature that seeks to avoid pain at all costs. God is calling us into living a different way; to be part of a different story than the one the world is telling us.ⁱⁱ

When we sit at Jesus' feet, listen to the knowledge imparted there, and follow Jesus' lead, we gain identity-shaping wisdom. Sometimes we yearn for it as much as we seek air to breathe. LISTEN! Jesus' word is revealed to us, in us, and through us, to the glory of God.

ⁱ M. Littleton, *Moody Monthly*, June 1989, p. 29.

ⁱⁱ Inspired by "God's Story, Our Story" sermon for Proper 19B by Rev. Danae Ashley