Co-redeemers

23 Pentecost

November 12, 2017

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16 [Psalm 70](http://lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp27_RCL.html#ps3)1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [Matthew 25:1-13](http://lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp27_RCL.html#gsp1)

Sophia. Chokhmah. Sapientia.

Wisdom.

Wisdom is radiant and unfading,
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,
and is found by those who seek her.
She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.
The person who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,
for she will be found sitting at the gate.

That’s part of our first reading today from the Wisdom of Solomon.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Wisdom books of the Bible are Proverbs, Psalms, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, The Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach.

Today I would like us to reflect on Wisdom as she appears in Proverbs 8.

Yes, *she*.

In Hebrew, Wisdom is *Chokhmah*. In Greek, *Sophia*. In *Latin*, Sapientia.

Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, like French, Spanish, and German, are gendered languages. Nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and participles have gender: masculine, feminine, neuter. In Spanish, La madre, but el padre. El burrito y el taco, but la fiesta.

In the Bible, God’s a guy—or at least God’s pronouns are: he, him, his.

Father, King, Old White Guy with a Beard.

Actually, thanks be to God, that last one’s not in the Bible.

As we know, women rarely have a lead role in the Bible. God wins the Oscar© each year for Best Actor. The Bible does have a few Best Actresses: Miriam, Ruth, Sarah.

But in Proverbs 8 Wisdom becomes Co-Best Actor with God:

The Lord created me as the beginning of his work,
    the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
    at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
    when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
    before the hills, I was brought forth. . . (Proverbs 8:22-25)

Scholars suggest that the idea of Wisdom side by side with God in the cosmos, even *before* the cosmos, comes from Canaanite religion: the head God, Baal, had a consort, Asherah.

Asherah was the goddess of fertility. Even after the Israelites began worshipping the God we know from the Bible, they kept small statues of Asherah in their homes. And why not? No fertility, no food; no fertility, no offspring.

Folks, it’s not an accident that Luke’s Gospel gives such a prominent place to Mary, as does the Qur’an.

It’s not an accident that Mary became more and more important in the Church. By the fifth century, Mary had become *theotókos*, God-bearer, Mother of God.

In traditional Roman Catholic teaching, “[Eve](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05646b.htm) is our natural mother because she is the origin of our natural life; so Mary is our spiritual mother because she is the origin of our spiritual life.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Mary is our spiritual mother because she is the origin of our spiritual life.

In Roman Catholicism, Mary becomes Mediatrix, “Mediator,” and even Co-Redemptrix, “Co-redeemer” (with Christ).

A Catholic priest entitles an article I found, “Mary, Mother of Salvation.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Now, this priest knows that Evangelical Protestants hate this idea; he entitles a section of his article, “A Stick to Beat Us With.”

Once again, why *not* Mary? Why *not* “Mary, Mother of Salvation”? If Jesus is salvation, and Mary is his Momma, then, ergo, she’s “Mother of salvation.”

Most of you know that we at St. Paul’s try to include, we try to *incorporate*, the Sacred Feminine: into our worship, into our prayer, into our lives.

Each summer we use our Julian of Norwich liturgy. Julian was a female medieval mystic. She uses “Mother” to describe God.

Once again, why not?

For their wedding service yesterday, Sara and Jerry asked that for “God” we use the three-word phrase “Mother and Father.”

Why not?

Let’s listen some more to Wisdom in Proverbs 8:

When he established the heavens, I was there,
    when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
    when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
    so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
    rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
    and delighting in the human race (8:27-31).

And delighting in the human race.

Delight . . . rejoicing . . . rejoicing . . .delighting.[[4]](#footnote-4)

But what *is* wisdom?[[5]](#footnote-5)

Well, in Proverbs wisdom is *with* God.

God is *with* Wisdom.

In the Episcopal Church we speak of being co-creators with God. And, as St. Teresa of Ávila prays, God is co-creator with us:

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks

 compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.[[6]](#footnote-6)

So, given what Teresa prays, let’s push a little further today—maybe *a lot further*.

Can we—can each of us as an individual, can we as a community—be a co-redemptrix?

Yes.

The late Henri Nouwen has a wonderful book, *The Wounded Healer*.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Each of us is wounded. But each of us can also be a healer. In binding up our wounds we can help to bind the wounds of others.

When we—and God—together founded Grace Episcopal Church ten years ago amid the ashes, muck, and cremains of this diocese, we were all wounded, some severely wounded: marginalized, condemned, ostracized, and rejected.

But as co-creators with God, we became wounded healers.

As we celebrate our ten years together, let’s remember:

* we have—intentionally—turned a parish into a family;
* we have—intentionally—become a downtown church;
* we have—intentionally—opened our doors to everyone.

We *are* redeemers.

I ask each of us to take time this week, in prayer, in reflection, to ask: How can *I* become an even greater redeemer? How can we, together, be even greater redeemers?

Then I ask each one of us, each and every one of us, to gently, quietly, patiently, even with humor, say to him- or herself: “Now get off your butt and get out there!”

Amen.

1. The Wisdom of Solomon, written in Greek, is part of the Apocrypha, or Deutero-canonical books of the Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “The Blessed Virgin Mary,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464b.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/mary-mother-of-salvation>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This word pattern is chiasmus, from the Greek letter *chi* that looks like a capital X, with a-b-b-a:  [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a rabbi’s teaching on Wisdom, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryAGuTqUWUE>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/PoemsAndPrayers/Teresa_Of_Avila_Christ_Has_No_Body.shtml>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [https://www.amazon.com/Wounded-Healer-Ministry-Contemporary-Society/dp/0385148038/ref=sr\_1\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1510421692&sr=1-1&keywords=the+wounded+healer&dpID=51f66yaFoaL&preST=\_SY291\_BO1,204,203,200\_QL40\_&dpSrc=srch](https://www.amazon.com/Wounded-Healer-Ministry-Contemporary-Society/dp/0385148038/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1510421692&sr=1-1&keywords=the+wounded+healer&dpID=51f66yaFoaL&preST=_SY291_BO1,204,203,200_QL40_&dpSrc=srch). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)