

July 14
Proverbs 8:22-36

“Take Delight”

After what we heard last week, we need a little encouragement. What we heard last week is a bit strange, a little harsh on the ear, maybe even just a tad bit embarrassing because it's both counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. Proverbs urges us to imitate God in terms of love and faithfulness. It asks us not to rely on our wisdom because God's purposes are much greater than ours. It counsels us that our own wisdom and shrewdness might lead us into evil. It boldly tells us to honor the LORD with our first fruits and not our leftovers. And it says, “My child, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Our cultural wisdom says mostly the opposite. It tells us to rely on ourselves and be our own person. While our cultural *wisdom* does not counsel us to do evil, our cultural *values* seem to do just that more often than we would wish. Our cultural wisdom does tell us to be generous—with our leftovers because we need first of all to take care of ourselves. And our prosperity Gospel tells us that if God loves me, God will affirm me and give me what I want. Last week's reading from Proverbs contradicts all those things which we regularly hear from sources all around us.

In other words, following the wisdom we heard from Proverbs last week will be difficult. So this week maybe we could use a little encouragement, no? We need some encouragement because God's wisdom is *really* odd. The reading chosen for today gives us that encouragement. One of the ways to hear Scripture is to listen for the emotional mood behind the words. The mood I hear in today's Scripture is one of confidence and joy and playfulness. Wisdom herself now speaks directly to us. Let me read from a different translation: “GOD sovereignly made me—the first, the basic—before he did anything else. I was brought into being a long time ago, well before Earth got its start. I arrived on the scene before Oceans, yes, even before Springs and Rivers and Lakes. When he drew a boundary for Sea, posted a sign that said NO TRESPASSING, and then staked out Earth's Foundations, I was right there with him, making sure everything fit. Day after day I was there, with my joyful applause, always enjoying his company, Delighted with the world of things and creatures, happily celebrating the human family.”

Are we having fun yet? We should be. Certainly religion is a serious thing. Faith is no small matter. And there are plenty of good reasons to fear the LORD. But if that were all there were to our relationship with God, well, no wonder so many people say, “No, thank you.” Who needs all that joyless, heavy seriousness?

But that's not all there is to our relationship with God. Not by a long shot. There is playfulness, joy, and delight. They're all over the Psalms and in more than a few of our hymns. There is Eucharist, which as you know means Thanksgiving.

Herb Brokering captures the spirit so well in his hymn “Earth and All Stars.” If I had gotten my act together earlier this week, we'd be singing it as the sermon hymn. Oh well. So I'll have to

quote it to you. “Hail, wind and rain! Loud blowing snowstorm! Sing to the LORD a new song! Flowers and trees! Loud rustling dry leaves! Sing to the LORD a new song! Classrooms and labs! Loud boiling test tubes! Sing to the LORD a new song! Athlete and band! Loud cheering people! Sing to the LORD a new song! Knowledge and truth! Loud sounding wisdom! Sing to the LORD a new song! Daughter and son! Loud praying members! Sing to the LORD a new song! For he has done marvelous things.”

Delight. Be serious about your faith. And also take delight in God’s Creation, imbued with wisdom, order, logic, and marvelous design. What nature reveals about God is incomplete. Nature does not fully reveal justice and grace and forgiveness. Nature does not show us the face of God. It’s incomplete. But nature *does* reveal. The wisdom Proverbs gives us is the wisdom that is built into the universe by its Creator. Some people call this natural law. We see order. And when we see chaos we see that it often leads to new life. We see renewal. We see that the earth is a pantry. There are scientist types that find that the universe is put together in such a way that sacrificial giving leads to new life (hint, hint). And there are others, like Martin Luther King, who believe the universe bends toward justice.

Take delight in what God himself takes delight: this marvelous, churning, surprisingly, when you think about the vast cold reaches of space, full-of-life creation. And take delight in what Wisdom herself delights, being in the presence of the LORD.

Encouraged yet? I hope so. Are we having fun yet? Considering who God is, maybe we should ask that a little more often.