

Pastor Kate Heinzl

Wisdom 7: 22- 8:1

...for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.
There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle,
mobile, clear, unpolluted,
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,
irresistible, beneficent, humane,
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,
all-powerful, overseeing all,
and penetrating through all spirits
that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion;
because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.
For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of God's goodness.

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;
for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

She is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

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

Matthew 11: 20-30 (The Message)

Next Jesus unleashed on the cities where he had worked the hardest but whose people had responded the least, shrugging their shoulders and going their own way.

“Doom to you, Chorazin! Doom, Bethsaida! If Tyre and Sidon had seen half of the powerful miracles you have seen, they would have been on their knees in a minute. At Judgment Day they’ll get off easy compared to you. And Capernaum! With all your peacock strutting, you are going to end up in the abyss. If the people of Sodom had had your chances, the city would still be around. At Judgment Day they’ll get off easy compared to you.”

Abruptly Jesus broke into prayer: “Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You’ve concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that’s the way you like to work.”

Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

CHILDREN’S TIME - was based on the children’s story “The Garden” by Arnold Lobel. It plays into the sermon, so if you don’t know the story, you can read/hear it [here](#).

SERMON:

That baby money plant that's being passed around - it's from a mother plant that a friend gave me last summer. For months that original plant didn't do much. It was alive, but I saw no growth. I tried moving it to another location - wasn't it getting the right amount of light? I tapped the soil with my finger - too dry? Too wet? I fussed. GROW I wanted to yell. Why aren't you growing?

Then one day, or one season, really, it did. It grew and grew and started sending up babies.

Oh how I think I am the one who needs to make things happen!
Our society is constantly telling us -

Just try a little harder...

As a church leader I sometimes feel that pressure too - come on pastor - why don't we have more people here - maybe if we just offer more programming, or switch things up... do SOMETHING, pastor!

That story of Toad in his garden - his mistaken belief that it was his responsibility to make the seeds grow - required his hard work - does that sound like you, at all? I think I could be the poster child for that mentality!

Our scripture today has something new to offer - I love Eugene Peterson's translation here -

Get away with Christ and ... and learn the unforced rhythms of grace. Learn from Jesus - who says I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.

Before we get too deeply into the end of our passage, and the wisdom of Frog and Toad,

I want to look at our scripture as a whole, and how it fits into the broader gospel.

The author of the gospel of Matthew - their vision of Jesus is one of a Moses-like teacher, the compassionate, healing Messiah - the one who has come to fulfill the Torah and prophets of old.¹

Our passage today fits into a longer passage where, thematically, Jesus is in conflict with the kingdom of this age. Jesus is offering a new vision, in stark contrast to the present times of his listeners.

This section of Matthew's gospel begins with "Then he began" or in the vernacular of Eugene Peterson "Next"...

Jesus lays into a couple of Galilean cities, 'Doom to you, Chorazin! Doom to you, Bethsaida!'. Then our text makes what feels like an abrupt shift to a prayer and invitation, and after our reading today, the conflict continues on a more granular level - with tensions regarding Jesus' claiming himself Lord of the Sabbath.

Commentators suggest this whole section deals with repentance - the radical reorientation of life to which Jesus calls us. And this call to radical reorientation - to Jesus' way - it leads to conflict with the ways of the world.

Those cities that Jesus warns - it's not that the inhabitants were skeptical of miracles, but weren't taking seriously Jesus' call for repentance - a reorientation of life that fits with Jesus' announcement of the inbreaking kingdom of God - no one is listening, really listening, he laments!²

But these woes of Jesus are not the final word - No, the good news, the good news finds its place among the unpretentious, not the wise and intelligent - from whom it's hidden.

We have here a rather unique passage in the synoptic gospels - where scholars believe the Jesus in our reading today is pictured as the messenger of transcendent Lady Wisdom - Lady Wisdom, that we heard of in the call to worship, where it said -

For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of God's goodness.

¹ Duling, Dennis. 2006. "Introduction to gospel of Matthew " in *The HarperCollins Study Bible: Revised Edition*. HarperCollins Publishers.

² Boring M. Eugene. 2015. *The New Interpreters' Bible Commentary, Vol. VII*. Abingdon Press. Pages 188-191.

Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; (Wisdom 7: 26-27)

For Matthew, Jesus is not merely the messenger who speaks *for* Wisdom, but *is this divine Wisdom*.³

And this divine wisdom message - it's for anyone - anyone who is ready to listen, to learn. This message of restoration is for all.

Come, Jesus says, (Read from bible)

Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

What does this ask of us? I think it might require us to surrender something - and that's not easy.

I'm still so much like Toad -

Even though I may be told to watch, wait, trust on God's grace - I think I need to keep doing, working harder

Even when those seeds come up, still my ego thinks it was all about ME - the work I put into something...

Surrender my way of doing things? Ooh...that's a big ask Jesus.

³ IBID.

Instead of working in ways our egos demand, Jesus says 'learn the unforced rhythms of grace' - that means repentance - radical reorientation to life, and to our daily work.

"Deep listening is an act of surrender .We risk being changed by what we hear," writes activist Valarie Kaur.

What might we hear if we deeply listen to Jesus' invitation?

What's the invitation to you? Are you willing to risk being changed?

Instead of hearing those voices that tell us we are responsible for all the change - the parts of us that want to join Toad in his garden, yelling at the seeds to grow!, what radical reorientation - what repentance - needs to happen in us?

This is a dangerous message for a pastor to preach, when we still have a whole bunch of key positions open on our volunteer slate!

I name and hold this tension.

Maybe there's a new way, a way that Christ is calling us to -

Walk with...work with...watch...learn...keep company with... and learn to live freely and lightly.

That's the way of Christ - that's the way I WANT to live, it's the way I want each of us to live.

And I want us to be about the work of being the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

What does it look like for you to learn from Christ - those unforced rhythms, AND to engage with the work before us?

When I dream about how we, the UMC community, might *Walk with...work with...keep company with* the Holy One, I imagine

sitting around after the service with you all and discussing what you heard, what touched you, what you wrestle with and question... and well, from a practical side, that requires someone stepping forward and taking some leadership.

I imagine our kids having ways to plug in more - maybe part of intergenerational discussions... I'm not sure what that might look like... and that means others joining in thinking creatively together and making it happen.

I imagine so many ways of walking, of keeping company with the Holy One together - of being about the work of kingdom building, as a body of Christ... AND...

And I hear over and over again how many of us are weary...

How many of us want to recover our life...to take a real rest... to learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

I want us to do this kingdom building work in the spirit of walking with Christ...

And this requires some type of repentance work. A radical reorientation.

Yes, Frog is right - gardening - these lives of ours, tending this world of ours - it is hard work...

It requires something of us - maybe everything of us.

As we take a few moments to listen, I invite you to consider the Frog parts of yourself and the Toad parts of yourself. When, where, how do you work so hard - maybe in ways that tire you out?

Might you learn new rhythms of unforced grace? What would that ask of you?

How might it refresh you, inviting you to see the kingdom here, now, growing all around?