

Theme: Men need wisdom

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we give you thanks for the gift of your being as we know you as three persons in one being: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; you created everything that is, you redeemed us as special beings of your creation, and you sanctified us, all through your actions with the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“An Islamic court sentenced a senior Malaysian politician to a month in prison (a week ago) Wednesday for taking a second wife without the permission of his first wife. Muslims are allowed to take up to four wives in Malaysia and the multiple marriage has become more popular with a ‘polygamy club’ being set up, although it remains a minority practice in this mainly Muslim country in Southeast Asia.

“But the man must ask the permission of his current wife before taking another, and she must agree before the second marriage is considered legal. Bung Mokhtar, 51, is deputy president of the parliamentarians’ club of the National Front coalition that has ruled Malaysia for 52 years. He was also fined (about \$300) in addition to the jail sentence.

“Bung was charged along with his second wife, actress ‘Zizie’ Izette Abdul Samad, aged 31, who was also fined. Malaysia runs a dual legal system with secular courts running alongside shariah courts for the majority Muslim population dealing with breaches of Islamic laws. Bung's lawyers have asked for a lesser sentence of just a fine, as it was his first offence.

“Groups such as Sisters in Islam, a Malaysian advocacy organization that aims to promote the rights of women, have condemned polygamy and there were protests against the practice outside the courtroom.” (David Chance, Reuters)

Bung must be a smart man. He holds high political office in Malaysia. He didn't get that far without some smarts. He's just not a very wise man. I mean, *two wives*? All I can see is a logistical nightmare. And the odds the two women will get along must be slim to none. I would ask, what was he thinking, but I can make an educated guess.

We need women for wisdom. At least in a country that condones polygamy, it is the wife who must approve another wife being added to a family. It is stories like this make me, and I suspect you too, to scratch our heads.

Well, today is Trinity Sunday. The Trinity is a head scratcher, too. Christians many centuries ago decided that, like our Jewish forebears, we are monotheists. But how could we worship Jesus and God and be monotheists? Well, it was decided that the Son and the Father are one, as Jesus says in John's gospel, "the Father and I are one." Once this issue was settled, then the problem of the Holy Spirit was solved by adding the Holy Spirit into the godhead, making a Trinity.

Today is the only day of the year we commemorate a doctrine, the Holy Trinity. It is said that this is the day of the year when preachers all over the world preach heresy. Trying to illustrate or find metaphors for the Trinity is fraught with danger. They never seem to be totally adequate.

Even the authors of the lectionary we use for our Sunday Bible readings have difficulty finding the right biblical texts for this day. So, here we have an Old Testament reading from Proverbs.

We can find references to a "spirit" in the Old Testament, but it is not really clear what is meant by this "spirit." New Testament writers did take off with the idea of a spirit who has divine attributes. Jesus promised the disciples that a spirit would come to them. But even these references in the New Testament are not entirely clear as to who or what this Spirit is.

Even the creeds add mention of the Holy Spirit in passing. I get a sense that even they could not quite put a finger on the Holy Spirit's role in the Trinity. They quickly shift from talking about the Spirit to the Spirit's relationship to the church.

The New Testament is very clear that Jesus is God's son, that Jesus is divine. But what is described in the New Testament is a father-son relationship. There is no reference of anyone else being involved.

But for today, we have this Old Testament reading from Proverbs. This really mucks everything up. Speaking of mucks, we wish the plug would

have worked on the Gulf leak. Pray for the people of the Gulf. Just who is this Wisdom and what is her relationship to God, let alone God as three persons in one?

In Proverbs and other wisdom literature in the Bible, we hear and read about Lady Wisdom. The word wisdom in both Hebrew and Greek is feminine. In Hebrew the word is *khokma* and in Greek it is *sophia*. This helps explain why men marry women. Besides the obvious reason, wisdom is feminine. Men need wisdom to succeed in the world. Women provide wisdom for men.

But the thing is, wisdom in the Bible is personified. Wisdom is a being. And wisdom is a woman. In fact, wisdom takes on divine attributes. Now for our monotheistic religions Judaism and Christianity, this creates a problem. What is wisdom and what is wisdom's relation to God?

Wisdom topics in the Old Testament include: truthfulness, fidelity, honesty, and control of appetites. In Biblical wisdom, there is a search for order. The wise person is righteous.

Let's see what Proverbs can tell us. Wisdom calls out from the rural areas, from city centers, from the entrances to cities where people must go through to get in and out of a city. She is everywhere where people cannot avoid hearing her call. And she is calling to us. Wisdom wants us to listen to her. Here Lady Wisdom is acting like a prophet.

Wisdom has a lot to say to us. After all, wisdom is feminine. And there is much more in Proverbs that wisdom has to say to us. But for today, we hear about wisdom's role in creation. Wisdom was the very first thing God created. So, wisdom is not God. Wisdom is a creature made by God. Wisdom was created a long time before the universe was created.

Wisdom was around before the Big Bang, before the first star put out its first photon, before the first planet was formed, before the Milky Way, before the sun, before the earth and the wonders that our planet has: the mountains, the oceans, the lakes and streams, the plants, and the animals.

Not only was wisdom around before all of *that*, wisdom helped *plan* all of that. Wisdom helped *create* all of that. Wisdom made God happy during the

acts of creation. Wisdom was glad with the world and with *us*. Wisdom is not dour. Wisdom is fun, dancing, and playing.

Wisdom seems to be God's consort, companion, and partner. Certainly wisdom has a place in the heavenly court above any place that we may have. It just may well be that wisdom's relationship to God may be beyond our understanding.

Wisdom seems to have a privileged place with God. But when we think of Trinity, Wisdom has a place with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What's that like? Who knows?

The end of our Old Testament reading gives us the image of a joyous, dancing Lady Wisdom. The orthodox churches have taken this image and applied it to the Trinity. They emphasize the Holy Trinity as *perichoresis*, which means to dance around. So we worship not a stodgy old God, but a joyous, dancing God who gives us gifts for ministry with gladness.

Kathleen Norris says, "In the Orthodox tradition, the icon of Wisdom depicts a woman seated on a throne. Her skin and her clothing are red, to symbolize the dawn emerging against the deep, starry blue of night."

Wisdom invites all of us to walk, laugh, play, and dance into the light of God's new day. But doing that with one wife is quite sufficient.

We now pray: Gracious God and giver of all good gifts, we give you thanks for the gift of wisdom: may we be cognizant of your presence in us, guiding us to say the right things and do the right things, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Text: **Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31** (NRSV)

**8** Does not wisdom call,  
and does not understanding raise her voice?  
2 On the heights, beside the way,  
at the crossroads she takes her stand;  
3 beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:  
4 "To you, O people, I call,  
and my cry is to all that live.

22 The Lord created me at the beginning<sup>b</sup> of his work,<sup>c</sup>  
the first of his acts of long ago.  
23 Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.  
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth—  
26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,<sup>d</sup>  
or the world's first bits of soil.  
27 When he established the heavens, I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
28 when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,  
29 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,  
30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;<sup>e</sup>  
and I was daily his<sup>f</sup> delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>b</sup> Or *me as the beginning*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *way*

<sup>d</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>e</sup> Another reading is *little child*

<sup>f</sup> Gk: Heb lacks *his*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Pr 8:1–4, Pr 8:22–31). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.