

Celebrating the Ways of Wisdom by Darlene Brewer, Ph.D. (Theology)

When we think of Wisdom, what comes to mind? Often, I think of those who are teachers as the Wise ones. They are those who see, those who speak, those who hear, those who know. In scripture Wisdom is often personified as a woman, embodied in the earth, rejoicing in creation's abundance and shouting to the skies of the infinite goodness of the world in which we live. The image of a woman shouting out in joy might surprise us in scripture, but it is a beautiful one, almost the sense of a woman come undone, surrendering to her own beauty as a reflection of the beauty and intensity of the work of God alive in creation.

In the scriptural tradition, Wisdom has to do with a fear of the Lord, or an ability to stand in awe and wonder before the mystery, the unspeakable, to celebrate the ways of creation bursting with life and to see oneself and every living being caught up in the abundance of life. There is Wisdom in keeping the ways of God, "rejoicing in God's inhabited world and delighting in the human race."

Wisdom is the discernment of truth. Perhaps Wisdom it is not so much the truth to which we arrive, but instead the process itself of moving through the feelings, thoughts and actions that often govern us to live in this moment and offer thanksgiving for what is offered as a gift. Our feelings, thoughts and actions are major dimensions of who we are as people. Indeed, our thoughts shape our reality and even define it. Wisdom, then, relates to our experiences and how we perceive reality, in all its myriad promises and challenges.

In his letter to the community in Rome, St. Paul says,

through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

5:3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

5:4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

5:5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope

Paul's soteriology, or understanding of suffering, needs a little unpacking. I think this is where we have developed an incorrect understanding that we look upon suffering itself as the cause of redemption, of wholeness of freedom in Jesus Christ. I think this notion is a misunderstanding of Paul's understanding of suffering or the proverbial..what does not kill us makes us stronger. Our response to suffering can make or break us. There are people who are broken through the experience of suffering, people who lack the support to develop the inner resources to become resilient, for instance. Suffering in the form of mental health issues, physical realities, lack of affordable housing, lack of intimacy, many forms of suffering can push people, either individually, or within a communal context, to a breakdown point. Some people recover from breakdown. For others, it is a long and arduous road. Our response to suffering, through the right support and inner resources for adaptability, can change the direction for the better. Jesus never sought suffering for its own sake and, wherever possible, called for the relief of suffering in the lives of every person he would encounter. Jesus' death alone is not redemptive. It is when we look at his teachings, his life and his eternal spirit embodied through our memory as Christians that we find resilience or resurrection. Our own lives then are also redemptive when we can seek ways to diminish suffering and rebuild a sense of wholeness as individuals and as communities. It is the whole work of the community together to diminish suffering in all creation that is the rejoicing of Sister Wisdom. This is also the work of Jesus, calling people into account for their communities' wellness and ability to respond to the needs of others crying out. This is also our call as disciples. And in order to do so we must also attend to our own woundedness, our own suffering that sometimes stifles and controls us.

When I think of wise people in my life, I often think of the people whose lives also radiate happiness. It is not excitement or even joy but a happiness that is grounded in being aware of one's choices and also those who have honed their abilities to realize that often we are part of something larger than what we think, feel and do. Thankfully. Who are the Wisdom-Makers in your life? Who are those in touch with the wider perceptions and realities of our world? Perhaps your grandmother, a child, even a tree. Whether we call this God, or the web of life, or just simply realize that we are shaped and influenced by others all the time and in every moment, we become aware that we are not in control. Wisdom involves some sense of losing control of our lives, letting go, and shouting to the skies, like WomanWisdom, that we place our hope and faith in the blessings that come without our doing. This letting go process is an ongoing life lesson.

Wisdom comes to us in a variety of forms. There is wisdom in an intellectual pursuit, in pursuits of the heart, pursuits of the spirit. Wisdom has something to do with who we are as pilgrims, on the journey, being called and listening and responding to that wise voice within and in response to the needs of our world. One of the ways in which I learn is through reading. I like to read many kinds of books, but some of my favourite are written by Deepak Chopra, a spiritual guide for our day. There is Wisdom in our bodies, awareness of what helps and hinders, the awareness of how to live well and how to encourage others to do the same. I think, after all, this is what Jesus was about.

I think Wisdom also relates to how we encounter and deal with pain and the pain of others. We often have the inclination to take on the pain of others, in ways that are perhaps unhealthy. We can be swallowed up and become anxious and taken over by someone else's suffering. One of our major struggles in our theological reflection, in our daily lives and in our understanding of Jesus' life and death is our experience with suffering. We are called to find ways in which we can diminish the suffering of others but first we must work on the diminishment of our own internal suffering. This is the exercise of our pastoral and spiritual care..when we visit people, when we chat with a co-worker, when we have an experience that jolts us in some way. What are some ways in which we can respond wisely to the suffering of another, without ignoring that suffering and without also taking it on ourselves? Here are some thoughts that might guide us.

You don't have to feel a certain way just to make me happy.  
I will help you get through this.  
I don't expect you to be perfect. You aren't letting me down.  
You can have the space you need, but I won't let you be alone.  
I will do all I can to show you that life is still good and joy still possible.  
I will take your healing as seriously as I take my own well-being.

What helps put us in touch with the Wisdom of our bodies? One way is to stop and release the energies, the feelings, thoughts and actions that get stored up within us. Let's take a moment to do a quick meditation on releasing anxiety or sadness.

What are some signs we are in touch with the Wisdom of our own bodies?  
We move in these ways:

You have a higher purpose  
You are in communion with the whole of life  
Your awareness is always open to change  
You feel acceptance for all others as your equal  
You seize every moment with renewed creativity, not clinging to the old and nurtured  
Your being is cradled in the rhythms of the universe. You feel safe and nurtured.  
Your idea of efficiency is to let life bring you what you need. Force, control, and struggle are not your way.  
You feel a sense of connection with your source.  
You are committed to giving as the source of all abundance.  
You see all change, including birth and death, against the background of immortality.  
Whatever is unchanging is most real to you.

In today's passage from the Gospel of John, Jesus is a figure of wisdom. He says to the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Just what does he mean, we do not know.

But there is wisdom in knowing what to say and what not to say, to realize that our words bear witness to who we are and we are responsible for them. In Jesus' words here, it is also imminent that there is a larger reality at work which we cannot totally perceive but a wholeness of which we catch glimpses in our everyday lives. There is an awareness here that our words, our thoughts and our actions are very connected with wisdom. We can cultivate wisdom that is in touch with this larger reality of hope that us beyond us but which touches us and calls us to rejoice. Let's join hands with Sister Wisdom today and shout our cries of exultation to the world.