

**Trinity Sunday/Father's Day**  
**"Delight of a Father"**  
**Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-32**  
**Rev. Joy Laughridge**

There is a nice image on the front of the bulletin this morning of a father and daughter dancing and having fun together. It's kind of an idyllic image of fatherhood that may or may not look like your own experience as a father or with your father, and it certainly doesn't capture every aspect of fatherhood. Children might disagree, but the dads *and* moms know, there is much more to being a parent than being fun. This is a photo of one moment in time in the relationship between a father and child. Not pictured are the hours dad and daughter aren't together because dad is at work. Not pictured is the lesson from dad in something and the eye rolling in response. Not pictured is the moment when dad disciplines the child. Well, I didn't choose this picture because it is the *most* relatable image for *most* people when they think of being a father or think of their own fathers, and I didn't even choose it *because* it is Father's Day. It happens to be a Father's Day-ish picture, but I really chose the photo because the image of a father delighting in and enjoying his child is one that we find in our Scripture text this morning which comes from Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs is part of a group of books in the Old Testament called the Poetic Books (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Job), and these books are, as the name suggests, poetic in nature. They don't deal with details about history and events. These books describe the human experience and give expression to the emotions, and longings, and the questions that come with it, and they use poetry as a literary form to do this. This morning, in Proverbs 8, we have a poem, and it's a poem about wisdom. Wisdom is something that is real but not tangible so in

Proverbs 8 the poet helps us think about and understand something about this intangible reality by personifying wisdom.

The poem begins with an introduction and a rhetorical question about wisdom. Does not wisdom call out from all the locations where human life and activities are carried out? In the homes where we raise our families; in the marketplace; in government buildings and courthouses; in theaters and galleries; in our worship spaces. Is wisdom accessible to us in all those places? Wisdom personified answers the question in verse 4 saying, yes! I'm accessible in all these places, and I'm not just here to be found if anyone happens to discover me. I'm actively calling out and trying to get everyone's attention.

In the next sections of the poem, wisdom tells people why they should listen to her. You should listen to me because what I say is true and it is helpful to you. My instruction is more valuable than silver, or gold, or rubies. I am trustworthy, and those who do listen to my instruction reap the benefits and rewards. The bulk of our lesson for today comes from the next section of the poem, and in this section of the poem, Wisdom moves from talking about the practical reasons for why we ought to listen to her to the subject of where her authority comes from. It's in this section where we find the parent/child image with God being the parent and wisdom being the child.

Wisdom says in verse 22, "the Lord created me." The Hebrew word that is translated as "created" in the NRSV literally means "fathered," and the words translated as "brought forth" in verse 24 mean "was given birth." As the child of God, Wisdom has a special relationship with God. She got to know and be with God before God created anything else, and as she goes on to say, she was there and witnessed the creation of the world. Here is where we see the image of God playfully and joyfully delighting in God's child like the father on the front of the bulletin. Verses 27-31 sort of sound like a child

gushing about getting to go with her dad to a take your child to work day. She feels her father's pleasure in her and knows that he is just as happy to have her at his side as she is to be there, and she loves this awesome world that her father is making - especially the people! The people are especially exciting because she can interact with them, and she has special insight that she can share with them because of the close relationship she has with her father *and* because she was there to observe as God designed, and organized, and ordered things.

Proverbs 8 is a poem, and the writer of the poem was not trying to describe a real person. He is making a point about how God is involved in and interacts with the world God made, and wisdom is the link. One commentator describes it like this saying, "Wisdom ... becomes the divine child, present at and active in creation. The most valued of all things created, Wisdom becomes the mediator between the Creator and the created world. In an age when Yahweh was increasingly understood as... far removed from the world of human dwelling and thus from the ken of human knowledge and experience, personified Wisdom and the tradition she embodied became the means by which to come to the knowledge of God."<sup>1</sup>

If the Poetic Books deal with the questions and the longings of the human heart, the longing behind this poem seems to be a longing for knowledge of and some kind of relationship with the Divine, and the question seems to be a question about whether the Divine can be perceived and known by little old people like us. The poet says yes, and when we listen to this poem about Wisdom, the beloved child of God, who was with God when God created the world, and who inhabits the world and acts as a bridge to connect God and people, there might be something about that that sounds familiar. It sounds

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<sup>1</sup> Perdue, Leo G. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Proverbs*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000, 146.

something like what we read in the prologue to John's Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was *with* God....he was in the beginning with God..."

The prologue to the Gospel of John is a key biblical text that supports the mysterious and uniquely Christian doctrine of the Trinity which says that God exists eternally as three distinct persons who are one in substance. The writer of Proverbs does describe Wisdom as God's child, and does describe a loving relationship between the Creator and the Creator's child Wisdom, and though the Apostle Paul refers to Jesus in I Corinthians 1:24 as "the wisdom of God," the ancient poet wasn't attempting to describe a God who exists as three persons in one, and he wasn't talking explicitly about Jesus. He *was* trying to answer those questions though about whether God has an interest in us and about if and how God can be known, and these are the same questions that the doctrine of the Trinity helps us answer. This is why we can hear the whisper of a truth that would become clearer later when the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

In Jesus Christ, the whisper that we hear in Proverbs becomes loud and clear. Like Wisdom in the poem, Jesus who was with the Father at the creation of the world, knows how God designed and built the universe. He knows the laws that are built into the fabric of creation, and he knows the secrets that lead to wellness, and wholeness, and flourishing in human life and in relationships. He knows all of this because he was *with* God but also because, as John says, he *is* God. And just as wisdom calls out to people in the poem, begging them to listen to what she has to say, Jesus lives to teach us the truth that leads to life. He came and lived among us, putting on human flesh, and he taught us the truth in word and deed. Now, he continues to teach us and lead us into the truth in the person of the Holy Spirit. He is, like Lady Wisdom, the mediator, who delights in the

human race and lives to engage us and bring us into relationship with God.

It is important for us to know and to be able to know that everything isn't just an accident- that there is a Creator who made everything with purpose and intention. And it is important for us to know that the Creator didn't just wind things up and step back, but that the Creator is actively involved in and moving in the created world and in our lives. It is important for us to know that the Creator has an interest in communicating with us and in knowing us and in being known by us. God came to us in Jesus so that we could know that all of these things are true, but today, the image that I want to highlight is that image of the Father delighting in the child because of all the things that it is important for us to know, to know that we are loved by the One who made us is the most important of all.

In the poem God delights in the child wisdom and vice versa. The picture on the bulletin cover helps us visualize the mutual love and affection between the father and child, and the image is not unlike the image that the church fathers offered of the members of the Trinity existing as a community of love caught up in a perpetual dance. The beautiful image of the members of the Trinity dancing with and delighting in each other becomes all the more beautiful when we understand that we are invited to come and join in. The Son comes to us, like wisdom, because the Son delights in us – and what delights the Son, delights the Father, and delights the Spirit – they are united and together in everything. And together, through the Son, they call out and invite us to come and join in on the dance.

When you look at the picture on the front of the bulletin that image may not be the one that captures how you imagine your relationship with God or how you imagine that God sees you, but God wants us to know that God's love for us is very much like what we see

in the picture. The revelation that we are loved in this special way by the Creator is a revelation that speaks to and answers one of the deepest human longings of all. We need to be loved. I saw a clip of Beth Moore teaching this weekend and she was saying with great passion, that we don't just want to be loved. It's truly a need. It's a need that was built into us when we were made and we should never ever feel ashamed of the fact that we feel that need. We were created to be loved, and we were created to be loved by God. The love that we need from God is a need that only God can fulfill, but sometimes we try to get that need met with other loves. There are other loves – the love of a spouse, or parents, or friends, and children. These loves are important, and they meet a need too, but in and of themselves, they don't meet the need that we have to be known and loved by our Creator. We may chase after them though, trying to fill the hole that only the love of God can fill, but even in the best case scenarios, other loves fall short, and in the worst case, the other loves that we chase fail us or hurt us.

Depending on what your own relationship with your father is like, a day like Father's Day can be a day when some may feel familiar feelings of hurt and rejection. It can be a day when some may feel again that they aren't lovable because you didn't have any assurances like that from your own father. Even if you had a good father and a good relationship with your father, those days can come for all of us, when, for other reasons, we wonder if anyone really sees me. Is there anyone who would choose to be around me? Does anyone really and truly love me? God's answer to each one of us today is a most certain yes. Every person in this room is a beloved child of God. You are the apple of God's eye. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dance with hands outstretched, calling and inviting you, the beloved, to come join in the dance. Join in the laughter and play. There is a place for you in that circle of love. Amen.

