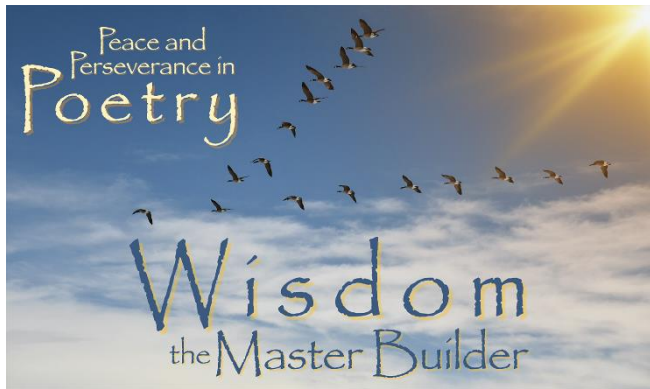




A SERMON

by Rev. Marcella Auld Glass: August 10, 2025



LAST WEEK, JOANN GOT US STARTED ON OUR SERMON SERIES on biblical poetry.

What is your response to hearing the word 'poetry'? Does it feel like some inaccessible mystery that is going to cause your 10th grade English teacher to be disappointed in you?

If that's true for you, I invite you to set aside that anxiety. Because poetry is not best experienced as a test, and is not intended to keep meaning hidden and inaccessible. W. H. Auden said that "**poetry is the clear expression of mixed feelings.**"

Robert Frost said that poetry is "**when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found its words.**"

I think that's why I love poetry. I'm better with words and thoughts than I am with my feelings, which often feel indescribable to me. So anything that helps me connect to my feelings is a gift.

My grandmother used to recite poems. I find her gift for that aspirational. I know of Longfellow's The Song of Hiawatha because she'd recite parts of it to me on rainy days at the lake, when there wasn't much else to do. I can still recite most of Longfellow's Psalm of Life because of hearing her say it.

"Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait."

She introduced me to the idea that poetry can be a commentary on life too.

Like Robert Herrick's words:

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

I feel the truth of that one the older I get. And when someone says "gather ye rosebuds" to me, they don't have to finish the line for me to connect to whole poem, and its reminder to live your life right now.

We have words from Shakespeare or more contemporary poets floating around in our heads, hiding in plain sight in our vocabularies, whether we know they are there or not. And that is true of scripture too.

The Hebrew people would sit around the campfires, like I'd sit with my grandmother at the lake, and tell each other the story of their faith, the stories of the lessons they had learned the hard way, the wisdom they had acquired along the way.

Poetry is also easier to remember and share than prose. Any song lyrics, which are also poetry of a kind, from the 1980s are solidly lodged in my brain more reliably than the 9th chapter of John's gospel. I'm not proud about it. But it's true.

That's why so much of the Hebrew Scriptures are poems or psalms, to help people learn the stories of their faith, and be able to share them.

As we enter worship this day, I invite you to be on the lookout for the poetry that's hiding in your vocabulary, in your world view, and in the world around us. May it help us have clear expression of our mixed feelings.

Proverbs 8:1-11, 22-36

*Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
'To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,*

and from my lips will come what is right;
for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
They are all straight to one who understands
and right to those who find knowledge.
Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold;
for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

(Wisdom says.....)

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
When God established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when God made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when God assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when God marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily God's delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

'And now, my children, listen to me:
happy are those who keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the Lord;
but those who miss me injure themselves;
all who hate me love death.'

IN OUR PASSAGE FROM PROVERBS, WISDOM IS PERSONIFIED AS A WOMAN who stands on the street corners and in the market place, sharing her knowledge with anyone and everyone who will listen.

Wisdom, which is closely connected to God's identity, is not limited to the temple or to the religious realm. God's Wisdom calls to us from places that are accessible to all of God's children. So, while we do believe that God is in this place here today, we shouldn't believe that God is *only* in this place. God is also standing out there at the corner of Fillmore and Jackson, calling out as Wisdom.

And we're told that her cry is to all who live.

Clearly not everyone chooses to listen to Wisdom as she cries out, but it is not for us to limit who her intended audience is.

Perhaps my favorite verse from this passage is, "*and I was daily God's delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in God's inhabited world and delighting in the human race.*"

Wisdom *delights* in humanity. Wisdom *rejoices* in God's world. Wisdom and God really enjoy each other's presence, Wisdom is, daily, God's delight.

Whenever you think that church, or faith, or God, is all about rules or judgment or seriousness, remember this passage. In God's own self there is delight and joy and enjoyment.

If that is how God exists, then shouldn't we consider that it is how God wants us to exist as well?

What is bringing you delight these days?

I am finding delight being with friends, sometimes over a meal, oftentimes at basketball games. I'm a little obsessed with San Francisco's newest team the Golden State Valkyries. And while I have more Valkyries branded clothing than one might be expected to have for a team that has been playing for only 4 months, what has been giving me delight is this.

This ridiculous purple sequin fringe jacket makes me so happy. I wear it across town when I walk or take MUNI to the games.

I don't want to overstate the value of a purple sequin jacket, but I don't want to minimize its value either. Because there were many years of my life when I would *never* have worn this in public.



Never.

It wouldn't have brought me delight. It would have embarrassed me. I would have been worried about looking ridiculous, or absurd, or worried that sequins make me look fat.

And I applaud young people who don't have those hangups and who figured it out much sooner than I did. Maybe I didn't always hear Wisdom's cry clearly the first time, but I have learned some things along life's way. I've lost friends and loved ones and learned that the one precious life we have is to be lived right here and right now. *The future is no place to place your better days*, as the song goes.

Because of Wisdom's voice, I've grown more comfortable in my own skin, slowly learning to love body, arthritic knees and all, and to appreciate the gifts of being embodied. Wisdom's voice has helped me see that my desire to dance is stronger than my fear of looking ridiculous while I dance. Wisdom's voice has helped me notice that my desire to jump into the ocean with friends is stronger than my fear of how I look in a swimsuit. Wisdom's voice has helped me recognize that my desire and need to stand up for justice is stronger than my fear of being arrested, allowing me to show up and speak differently in the world.

Listen again to Wisdom's call to us:

'And now, my children, listen to me:

happy are those who keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.

Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.

For whoever finds me finds life

It can be easy to despair about the state of the human race if you follow the news. And it is important to follow the news because we have work to do. It matters that we notice and call out the problems so we can change. But we won't find wisdom if we get stuck in despair, or in fear, as Joann reminded us last week. To find wisdom, we have to remember to seek delight in each other too.

Are we looking for moments of delight in our lives? Are we giving ourselves time and space for delight to happen? Delight requires us to slow down in the midst of our daily routines and notice, to be present with and for each other. To find joy in humanity.

One of my email signatures has a quote from EB White, the author of *Charlotte's Web*, who said, "Always be on the lookout for the presence of wonder."

Some people think Wisdom in this Proverbs text is a stand in for the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps they think Old Testament Wisdom stands for Jesus. There have been religious leaders over the years who don't like the idea of a female expression of God, present at the founding of the world. I am okay with letting Wisdom just describe herself, without her having to be a code for something else.

She was the first act of God's creation. She is literally older than the hills and is not to be confused with any of God's later works of creation because she was there first and saw some things that you and I can only imagine. "When God established the heavens, I was there, when God drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when they established the fountains of the deep, when God assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress their command, when God marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside God, like a master worker."

I suspect the author of John knew this passage of Proverbs as he wrote the prologue to his gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life,* and the life was the light of all people.*

The delight of wisdom was there at the very beginning, with the Word, with God. And this passage calls us to remember the importance, joy, and love of God's creating acts. As we look at the world around us, we should remember that God created this world in love and with care.

The description of God at work, creating the world, and Wisdom's claim to be a master builder, might lead you to imagine a lot of hard hats and safety vests, OSHA regulations, and the stress of budgets and deadlines. But when God and Wisdom team up, remember what the next verses are?

"and I was daily God's delight,
rejoicing before God always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race."

That's the kind of working conditions I want to be a part of. I'm sure I'm a delight to work with. *Don't ask the church staff.*

But really. On what kind of foundation do we want to build things? A foundation of God's justice, mercy, wisdom, and delight?

Or a foundation of fear, folly, greed, and hatred?

What do we want to build with our lives, with our faith community, bringing life and delight to the world?

We see plenty of destruction and shoddy construction going on in the political world right now. They could use Wisdom at their side, a master worker.

As Wisdom admits, she can cry out, but she can't make people listen. So what are we to do, as people who value wisdom, who want to join with God in building a better world during a time of destruction?

Author Maxine Hong Kingston says "Children, everybody, here's what to do....in a time of destruction, create something.

A poem. A parade. A community. A school. A vow. A moral principle. One peaceful moment."

Last week, Joann invited you to read through the book of Proverbs, a chapter a day. It's not too late to start. You can catch up. Today, I invite you to look for delight in the world around you. And if you don't see it, be it, share it, create it. It may or may not involve sequins.

It's a heavy time in the world, and we have work to do to join in God's work of justice, hope, and love. But let Wisdom and delight be our companions in the work.

Amen.

Kaylin Haught, **God Says Yes To Me** (In Poetry 180, Billy Collins, ed)

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic

and she said yes

I asked her if it was okay to be short

and she said it sure is

I asked her if I could wear nail polish

or not wear nail polish

and she said honey

she calls me that sometimes

she said you can do just exactly

what you want to

Thanks God I said

And is it even okay if I don't paragraph

my letters

Sweetcakes God said

who knows where she picked that up

what I'm telling you is

Yes Yes Yes