

Sermon Notes: August 15, 2021 **Focus:** Sophia / Wisdom [Lectionary Readings](#)

Proverbs 9:1-6 *Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."*

Nietzsche wrote in 1888 "out of life's school of war—what doesn't kill me, makes me stronger." The last half of the quote has become a worn-out cliché. It is as likely that we will be permanently disabled from that which is trying to kill us. So, I would say it differently, "Wisdom comes at a price."

Pain does not equal wisdom. Have you smashed into the same wall year after year expecting something different? There weakness and madness lie. Life's pain without the proper 'digestion' of costly wisdom can leave you permanently warped.

Wisdom is synthesized pain. Between God's grace, time elapsed, and our own courage, we can make Nietzsche's insight our own. Wisdom is calling us to dinner. She has made a feast and asks us to linger. If we treat wisdom as a sort of medicinal pill, it's like slamming a glass of wine and choking down the bread to rush back into the world's arena without wisdom's healing time. A dinner party needs time to settle into.

Proverbs 9 is on my personal best seller list. I stumble through and carry a fair bit of personal pain in life. However, I know that God has made me a wisdom dinner and calls me/us home. I have enjoyed a good merlot and broke the savory loaf of wisdom. I care about scriptures like these because they have awakened a longing for depth.

I return to female and feminine imagery regularly to understand my own faith. I do this because the feminine was actively policed growing up. "Good women do *v*. Faithful women are *w*. Feminine women look *x*. A good wife is *y*." All of it was made up. Maybe it helped "good order" and control, but it was gross and destructive. (Yes, I still think God has masculine attributes and male imagery is still good to increase our faith.)

At least for me, this feminine control was made up from a grab bag of Rush Limbaugh sound bits. There were cherry-picked talking points about black people, queer people, and unrighteous women -- all the unholy triune enemy of the church. Let's not forget cautionary movies involving rabbits boiling on a stove (1987's *Fatal Attraction*). My youth is now ancient history, but today some overt misogyny has gone underground. However, an unspoken hatred of women still boils with a pain yet to be synthesized. We have work to do to find ourselves dining in the house of God and her wisdom.

Stole As a baby priest, I received a stole as one of my ordination gifts. (Remember the priest's stole is that long strip of cloth that hangs around their neck and drapes down the front on both sides.) The gift giver and liturgical artist, Carol Wiggs, asked me what themes I wanted: "feminine images of God" was my immediate response.

So, she got to work. There are red pillars of the left-handed side of the stole that reference Proverbs 9 (today's scripture). Hosea's wrathful and protective mama bear is there too. There is a dancing holy spirit and turtle (I can't remember exactly how she got a turtle in the mix). Finally, there are three missing beads.

When the stole was new there were three beads stitched in. Two beads close together and one further apart. According to Carol, they were a prediction of the number of children we would have and their relative chronology. I am not into fortune telling, but at the time we only had Lauren. She was spot on for the number and arrival timing of our boys.

Character v creation If you are theologically concerned about how many angels dance of the head of a pin, you will dutifully correct me that personified wisdom in Proverbs 9 is a *creation* of God. You will inform me that Proverbs 9 is about the created order of God and therefore can't be a description of God's essential character. But I know that God is female (and male too) because of experience and study. I see it, study it, and feel it in how wisdom has been revealed to me. If you want to deep dive this academically defensible position, read Elizabeth Johnson's seminal work called *She Who Is*.

Women and Satan Women and femininity have been stand-ins for wisdom's opposite repeatedly. Women are portrayed as cunning and salacious trappers. The Bible is also not very charitable either. We struggle to find a balance between the gifts of masculine and feminine. Organized religion itself tends to skew masculine and authoritarian. I would go so far as to say that some of the worst moments in our history come when we don't affirm or trust the feminine in God as life-giving and authentic.

"You're wrong about" If I were a priest coming up in the 1960's, I would try to impress you with books overflowing my office shelves. But my eyesight is complete garbage now and everything I now consume is on kindle and audible. If you are wondering why I keep referring to podcasts, it is because I don't find sitting down with a paper book restorative anymore. So, podcasts. I offer you the show called "You're Wrong About." They did a three-part book discussion on the 1972 Mike Warnke's book *The Satan Seller*. The book is full of Christian nightmares involving satanic rituals and the youth being lost to university (all fiction in the guise of memoir). Mike Warnke writes at length about women seducing hapless men into Satanism to trap them into sex, wearing robes, and having a home cooked meal forced on to them.

The big takeaway I got from the show is how Christianity paints femininity. Part 3 of the series: *I think that that's like a big part of organized religion is that like "we're the ones that have access to the supernatural right and it's like they (women) can't have access to any kind of genuine religious or spiritual insight, they have to just be summoning Satan" ... I have a theory that allegations of witchcraft have been inspired by all number of things including (women's) financial independence...and I think women are often required to learn emotional intelligence because of their positions in history and because that's often the only power available to them.*

I know the Episcopal Church has worked hard recently not to disenfranchise women, but still has a long way to go in pay equity and leadership at the rector level. We would never equate femininity with heart of darkness, but we still have much to learn from God's seven pillars of wisdom. The House of Bishops is still overwhelmingly male, but I am proud that we are at least making baby steps in the right direction. Let's keep dining with God in her house, glad that men and women are both there enjoying a good glass of wine.

Todd