

## **SERMON: Sunday – 26 March 2023 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **Jesus and Sophia: Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear**

Proverbs 1:20-33

Luke 8:1-15

There are clear connections between the 2 scriptures we read today. One is about Jesus and one is about Wisdom, or Sophia in the Greek.

In the Proverbs we hear how Wisdom calls out in the streets but is hidden from the foolish.

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Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;

... they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me,

(Proverbs 1:20, 28)

In Luke we hear how Jesus speaks in parables and how he says that the meaning of the parables is hidden so that

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“though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’

(Luke 8:10)

There is a hiddenness to the truth. Real understanding doesn't come naturally. It must be listened for and searched for. It must be given the right conditions for growth, just as a seed is given the right conditions in order to become establish and flourish - light, warmth, water, food, and air - elements that are used to describe Jesus the Christ - light, water of life, bread of life, served in a spirit of warm compassion and air-like freedom.

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There was an interesting article in the news this week on further research confirming the importance of morning light and sleep. See at the bottom of the image it says that “our bodies are guided by light”.

The research points out that morning light is a potent antidepressant – sometimes as effective as pharmaceutical antidepressants as Serotonin is produced naturally (without the side effects of drugs) when sunlight enters your eyes.

Morning light therapy has been shown to be beneficial in the treatment of seasonal affective disorder (Sad), perinatal depression, bipolar depression, eating disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), significantly improves alertness and mood. It can reduce chronic pain, boost energy levels and mental performance, and result in better sleep.

Getting enough natural light during the day is critical for quality sleep at night – and sleep is essential if you want to function in the day. When you sleep, your brain forges new thought connections and memories are consolidated. Without sleep, your ability to concentrate, learn and remember is impaired.

Your immune system is also reliant on sleep. While you sleep, it produces protective, infection-fighting antibodies and cytokines. Sleep deprivation prevents it from building up these defences, so your body may not be able to fend off invaders, and recovery from illness can take longer.

This daily cycle regulates not just our sleep and wake patterns – but also digestion, hormonal activity and other vital body functions.

[https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/mar/19/spring-forward-why-you-should-make-the-most-of-the-extra-daylight-clocks-go-forward?utm\\_term=6417e856776bf1457814ed48b9c6eae3&utm\\_campaign=GuardianTodayUK&utm\\_source=esp&utm\\_medium=Email&CMP=GTUK\\_email](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/mar/19/spring-forward-why-you-should-make-the-most-of-the-extra-daylight-clocks-go-forward?utm_term=6417e856776bf1457814ed48b9c6eae3&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUK&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTUK_email))

So as the clocks have changed and the days get longer, let's make the most of being guided by the light of each day so that we help create the right conditions for the word of God to flourish.

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And not only must the word of God, which is truth, be listened for, sought out and searched for, it must be digested, retained, grappled with.

As Jesus put it, hearing the word, retaining it and persevering in order to produce something good from a noble heart (Luke 8:15).

It needs what some people have called a beginner's mind. Or as Jesus put it, unless you change and become like a child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 18:3)

Beginner's mind is probably a good term in that it describes a healthy attitude for believers to try to nurture. It's a humble thing to consider oneself only ever

as a beginner and not someone who's seen it all, done it all and has nothing else to learn.

Disciples are life long learners from their Master. And so people of faith are always learning and must therefore have a teachable spirit or beginner's mind.

We've got to balance our knowing with a willingness not to know the whole picture. Otherwise the seed becomes stunted and our growth stops as there's no capacity for something new to happen to us after that point.

A teachable spirit recognises what I heard someone say this week, that "existence is alive with possibility".

It can be so refreshing to meet people who have that buzz about learning something new, and it's especially touching to hear someone with the beginner's excitement of discovering the truth that they are forgiven and that God loves them just as they are and not as they or others think they should be.

I had a situation this week when someone was asking questions about faith and kept apologising for asking what they called were stupid questions. To which the only response had to be please don't apologise. There's no such thing as a daft question, especially when it comes to matters of faith. It helps my understanding when you ask me questions. So thank you. We're learning this stuff together. And that's how God likes it.

I think we have something to learn from the way the farmer in the parable scatters the seed everywhere - he liberally, abundantly - even to places where it either never gets a chance to root or if it does root, the roots don't get the opportunity to mature.

Jesus tells us that the seed is the word of God, the truth. And if the word of God is scattered everywhere it tells us of the generous nature of the Sower who wants the seed to take root far and wide, indeed everywhere. There's not to be a place where the Sower doesn't scatter seed, no place where God's presence through the word is not to be found.

Let's pause for a wee reflection on Wisdom from the STB material:

Wisdom comes in all shapes and sizes!

We have a mental image of wisdom:

an ancient academic, surrounded by books;

the minister known to dish out welcome advice (wry look);

the schoolteacher who taught us to spell and do our tables.

But what if she is the quiet one busy in the kitchen at church gatherings?

Or if she is the woman behind the counter in the post office, or indeed behind you in the queue? She might even be the lady you pass each day on your way to work,

or the lady at church you see each week,  
but have no idea what she is called.

What if...

what if we were to see wisdom in the faces of everyone we meet? What if everyone had something to teach us?

What if...

Well if everyone has something to teach us then we must have a teachable spirit or beginner's mind in order to receive it. That is good soil in which to plant what we might learn from each other.

The portrayal of Wisdom in Proverbs 1 evokes a time very much like our own, when there seems to be so much folly in the way people run society and live their lives that those who have some insight into what has gone wrong despair of the tide of chaos ever being reversed. Wisdom is hoarse from shouting a message that nobody hears. She is tired and jaded—almost, but not quite ready to abandon her people to the consequences of their foolish choices. The passage ends with a quiet reminder that there is still hope of avoiding disaster, but only for those who will listen to Wisdom's voice and act on what they hear.

As we walk with Jesus and his companions through Lent on the way to the Cross, the skies are darkening overhead, and the mood is somber. He knows, as we do, that the end is near. His male disciples are in denial, as shown by their behaviour later on—betrayal, denial and scattering in fear. The thoughts and feelings of his female followers can only be a matter of speculation, but thanks to the author of Luke, describing an earlier, brighter period in their travels, we know of their existence, and we even know some of their names: Mary from the Galilean town of Magdala; Joanna, wife of a high-ranking Jewish official, and Susanna. These were mature women, with sufficient resources of their own to be able to offer financial support. They had been through troubles of their own, many of them having been healed by Jesus of physical and psychological complaints. Most significantly, they were the ones who stuck with him to the end, watching from a distance as he died (Luke 23:49) and going to the tomb to anoint his body as soon as the law allowed (24:1).

Three verses. That's all. Three Bible verses that tell us that a group of women travelled with the men called disciples and with Jesus.

Three verses that Luke chooses to put in the context of the story of the Sower and the seed.

And the disciples were listening.

And the women were listening.  
They had ears to hear.  
And when the cock crowed and the soldiers came and the body of Jesus was  
taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb  
which plants were still growing?  
Who was still there?

Let's pray,  
Yeshua  
God  
Source  
of Sophia  
of Wisdom  
Light for the World  
Teacher  
Rabboni  
Master  
Scatterer of great seed  
We are yours  
Now and forever  
Amen.