

Pentecost 16 (Lectionary 24) Year B September 12, 2021
Proverbs 1:20-33, Psalm 19
Epiphany, Winnipeg

The month of September is being observed by more and more churches throughout the world as the Season of Creation, when we give thanks for the creation all around us, and we give thanks for God's ongoing gift of creation and care for creation. We remember too that we are a part of creation; it's not something we look at or manipulate. We're a part of creation, of all that God has made, just like all the parts of our body are part of the body....

So here's a creation story:

On Friday evening fifty or so people sat at the edge of Whittier Park, with a view across the river to the Exchange district, with downtown Winnipeg and the Human Rights Museum in view too. We were there for some live outdoor theatre, to see a play called *Meet Me at Dawn*, about two women who find themselves shipwrecked on an island. As the play unfolds they try to understand their situation more deeply – what's going on, and how stranded are they? - and they also wade into the deep waters of their relationship, and begin to see how complex and beautiful and extremely difficult it is. While their stormy relationship was played out on the riverbank, we could see a storm in the sky growing and move closer. There was lightning in the distance, and the wind started to pick up, and the actors acted their stormy parts the wind blew at their clothes and hair and the lightning moved closer. Finally, when one of them was standing up delivering the most intense lines of the evening lightning flashed right across the river and thunder boomed out a second later. The timing was perfect. And nobody planned it that way. Nature just did it.

We read Psalm 19 together a few moments ago:

¹The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims its maker's handiwork. ²**One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts**

knowledge to another.

³Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard,

⁴**their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world...**

The heavens added their own voices that night. Day and day spoke to each other; night and night spoke knowledge to each other, two women spoke of their lives to one another, and for that hour and twenty minutes the heavens and the play and the backdrop of downtown Winnipeg on the other side of the river and the small crowd of people on our side of the river all kind of breathed together to be a part of one beautiful thing that was happening. Like everything going on was part of the same creation.

Season of Creation. And just for fun, let's call it Season of Wisdom too. Our first reading today was from the book of Proverbs, and right here at the start of Proverbs we heard about wisdom, who is a woman calling out at the street corner and in the city square. Later on in Proverbs that same woman wisdom will talk about being with God even before creation began, and wisdom will say – it's in Chapter 8, so check it out – "I was beside God like a master worker, delighting in this whole creation, in the world and the people." Wisdom was with God before the beginning began, and the woman Wisdom was beside God like a master worker. Maybe wisdom was there on Friday evening, delighting in the lightning and the thunder, even delighting in all these people gathered and rejoicing in the skill of those actors.

It's an interesting thing that I think we miss, sort of buried there in all these pages of Scripture. Wisdom speaking with God from creation, wisdom portrayed

as a woman who is a part of everything all around, and wisdom, we find, is all about how we live kindly, and wisely, and justly, and peacefully, with one another and with the world around us.

As leaves turn and geese migrate, as squirrels squirrel away and as classrooms fill up, when you go down to the river to pray or down to the kitchen to cook, listen for the voice of wisdom that kind of pulls all of creation together, and calls us to live as part of that whole creation; listen for that voice of wisdom, listen and enjoy that gift of creation.

Nice, eh?

But notice this too: When wisdom speaks here in Proverbs chapter 1, right from the start, wisdom speaks a warning that if we don't listen and act wisely, and kindly, and justly and peacefully with one another and the world around us, we and all creation will suffer for it. Something else to think about – and we don't need to be reminded about all the statistics and science and stories we see and hear all around us. It's just something we know, and we need to listen as the world around us changes, naturally and unnaturally. Because wisdom speaks, right here in creation.

Here's a story of creation, Part 2: On Friday night at the play, when all the tension on stage was building up for the big stormy ending, lightning flashed right across the river and thunder boomed out a second later. The timing was perfect. And nobody planned it that way. Nature just did it. And then the stage manager walked in, in the middle of the scene, and said, "We're so sorry, but we're going to have to stop now. We're only ten minutes away from the end, and it's a great ending, but the lightning is too close, and the most important thing is everybody's safety." We knew that was coming. So we groaned, and laughed, and clapped anyway, and were soaked by the time we got back to our cars.

It was like nature spoke and we listened, it was like wisdom was standing on the street corner and in the sky and calling out, and for once, we listened, and we stopped what we were doing, and maybe even avoided a disaster. Who knows? And the funny thing was that the whole experience still felt rich and full. It wasn't disappointing that we didn't get the full hour and a half, it didn't even seem like the play ended at the wrong time. The wisdom of the heavens spoke and said, "We think it's time for you to stop now. You should go home." So we listened and left. And it was enough.

In some ways, the word that wisdom offers, the word that creation speaks, and the word that God speaks, is that what we are given is enough. The point of life is not to make sure that we get our money's worth, and more, when the play is over. The point is to receive the gifts that we are given by God, and to receive them wisely, which simply means that we all get the gifts we need, and we trust that God, in God's wisdom, will keep giving all the gifts this creation will need.

And maybe that's simply the wisdom that Christ speaks in that reading from Mark today. You might recall him saying this: "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." That's a deep and thick and rich handful of words, and it's probably a topic for a whole sermon or a whole book or library on its own, but for now maybe Jesus is simply speaking wisdom that says that we are free from trying to get more, or save our lives more, or look after ourselves more. And he's speaking a promise that when we are free from those things we will find that all that we need is given for us already. When the play ends before its time, when the lightning and thunder speak, when the creation around us suffers or thrives, when the cross is full or the tomb is empty, we hear the wisdom of Jesus...that all we need is given for us already. AMEN.