

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral  
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Some of you are looking at your bulletins, and seeing that the Very Reverend Roy Coulter is scheduled to preach right now. The Very Reverend Roy Coulter called me on Friday, and said "Bill, I just discovered that I'm supposed to preach on Sunday, but I'm scheduled to take my granddaughter to the Coast." I said, "Well, you'd better do that. And I'll preach...I got enough hot air for another sermon." He says "Well, you do, Bill." So...he affirmed me. And then, Canon Dubay is celebrating in my place.

Now in the Gospel reading today, we heard from John. And from the Epistle, we heard from Paul. But we heard something new in the Hebrew Scriptures...something we don't usually hear. We heard from the Wisdom Literature of Scripture....which is Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs. We're in a new lectionary cycle; it's called the Revised Common Lectionary. We just went to it last year. And one of the advantages, is they have this Wisdom Literature in our Sunday readings. It's the first time as a priest, in fifteen years, that I've heard from my favorite part of the Bible on Sunday morning...Wisdom Literature. And it's one of the best pieces out of the Wisdom Canon.

Wisdom is walking around the marketplace. In Hebrew, Wisdom is a feminine description of God. This is not God the Father; this is God the Female--that feminine aspect. And in Hebrew, Spirit is always feminine. So this is the feminine side of God, walking through the marketplace, calling us to insight. One of the reasons I love the Anglican Church, is we have been comfortable with the common sense of the marketplace. And we say God can speak Wisdom that way, as well. We don't only have to speak in theological speak, God language.

The early Anglicans were the ones who were risking their lives to put the Gospel into English..into the language of the people. We've always felt that God speaks practically to us, and that Wisdom is simple--but not easy. So today, in the spirit of the Wisdom tradition that we have...and have finally read on a Sunday morning...I want to offer you some Wisdom from the marketplace, and then talk about how it fits with church.

This is Wisdom born out of the Family Therapy movement. We all need it...be honest. Basically, what happened was that Murray Bowen, and some others, started counseling families, about 40 or 50 years ago now. And they started to see realities that happened among groups of people. There was someone named Ed Friedman, who was trained as a family therapist, and he did a lot of family therapy. But he was also a rabbi, and he had a congregation in Washington, D.C. He began to notice that congregations acted just like families...that there are similarities. So he started bringing the wisdom he had, in his training with families, into the congregation. And he wrote a book called Generation To Generation. We pass down our wisdom, and insight, from generation to generation.

And then Ed Friedman had an acolyte, named Peter Steinke, who popularized. If Friedman is Jesus, Steinke is Paul, right?--he's sending out the Word. So Peter Steinke

says, based on these principles of how groups of people work, there are some places we'll want to focus our attention on...and then some other places that are not so helpful. And he lists seven. I'll give you two today. This is Wisdom that profoundly impacts who we are, but does not come from Scripture.

The first one, Steinke says, is focus on challenge, not comfort. So I invite you today, to focus on challenge, not comfort. And let's begin with how you come to church. Do you come utterly depleted, and needing to be filled up again? Needing to be comforted and soothed, because life is so difficult? Sometimes, we all do that, from time to time. But if we're not careful, we fall into a pattern of depletion. We live a life of depletion, where we sort of arrive here and say "Fill me, Jesus. I'm empty. I need to be comforted. My life is too challenging."

I want to invite you into a different idea, here, through Steinke...that one of the places we need to be challenged is here--spiritually. Think with me, about a young child, who is building their immune system. Every parent worries about that in their child...getting them healthy, so they'll be healthy. How does a child build an immune system? Their budding immune system is challenged! The more they get sick--the stronger they get, as long as they're not overwhelmed. And so it is with us spiritually. The more challenged we are, the deeper we grow in our wisdom, and in our grace. If we only seek comfort, we don't grow. We become like the person in Scripture who was sitting by the well of Siloam, when Jesus walked by. "Jesus--give me a blessing" he said, "Give me a blessing." And Jesus said, "Well, you're sitting right near the pool. That's a healing pool--why don't you just get in there?" "Well," he said, "every time the water moves (which is the signal for healing energy)--someone else jumps in before me." Jesus says, "Well why don't you just pick up your mat and walk?" Challenge--not comfort. Jesus didn't say, "Oh--you poor little guy, you just sit right,...get up and walk!" He said.

If you look at Scripture, Jesus pretty much always responds that way...that's why people got so angry with Him. He comforted a few, but mostly He challenged. And He looked right at the person, and had that incredible insight that saw right where they were either hiding--or feeling sorry for themselves--and He went right there. Remember the rich man, who said: "Lord, what must I do to receive the Kingdom of God?" "Well, keep the Law..do the..." "Well I do all those..." "Then sell everything, and give it to the poor!" ("Ugh"--gasps) He had everyone's number...and He has yours! He's looking to challenge you. And I promise you...some of those experiences of life, are just for that reason...for challenge. Seek challenge, not comfort.

We've all learned this, from time to time, in our lives. And we usually have to re-learn it. I learned it in high school when I was on the wrestling team. My friend Peter Greder and I would wrestle each other in practice, and Peter didn't know any speed but full-blast. So it was kind of a battle with Peter, during the workouts. Well, one day Peter fell and broke his wrist, and couldn't wrestle anymore. So I had other practice companions, and one was Jeff Rosner. Jeff used to be in practice in the back corner. And what he would do during the difficult practice times, was say "Let's pretend we're struggling." He called them "struggle moves." From the coach far away, it looked like you were really working hard, but you were actually just goofing around. Oh...you can do this in

practice? I was naive, I didn't know it. Then I realized...well, that's why Jeff always loses in the meets! He mopped the floor every time! Because he wasn't working hard. He wasn't challenging himself. We see it over and over again in others. But sometimes we forget about ourselves.

God requires challenge. Jesus will bring the comfort to you. Your work--and my work--is to challenge ourselves. Think of God, and the story of Creation. When God gets to the Sabbath Day--the seventh day--God rests...not because God is depleted, and needs comfort...and sort of...sucks His thumb...and says "oo-oh..." No, God rests because of the joy of Creation, and the fullness that there is, and that God met the challenge of creating this beautiful universe! And so we are called into that same rhythm of life, to seek the challenge. God will surprise you, with the comfort. Wisdom that comes from the marketplace, doesn't come necessarily from church...although Jesus lived it every day of His life, and we see that in the Gospels.

Steinke has another one. He bids us to focus on self--not others. Focus on yourself--not on others. I hate that one. See, when I have a problem, what I prefer to do--and I'm an expert in this, if you need help--is find out someone else is the problem, identify the issues they have, and then suggest in a rather imperious-sounding voice...that they change. And that will make my life a lot easier. And it's especially nice because then I don't have to change. Do you know anyone who might do this? Or maybe, do you ever see someone in the mirror who does that? It's so much easier to identify someone else externally as the problem, and focus on them. But we learn every day again--don't we--that we cannot change them. We can only change ourselves. And when we're in a deep, intimate, close relationship--often in families, or close friends--we realize the power. If we change ourselves, it has enormous power to free others to change...and to grow...and to deepen.

In the Gospel today, John has Jesus talk about Himself--not about others. And if you look through the Gospels, Jesus is often talking about Himself. "Who do people say that I am?" He asks the disciples. Have you ever walked up to a group..."Hey, who do you think I am...talk about me." No--it's too scary! Jesus does it, and then they say, "Well, some think You're Elijah, Jesus...and some think You're this and that..." "Well--who do you say that I am?" He says to the disciples. "Who am I?" I dare you to try that! Instead of identifying others as the problem...maybe engage people with what they see in you.

The most powerful source for change in this world, is an active, integrated, dynamic self...someone who is within their boundaries, and living their life in a way that is responsible and self-regulating. You know the type...many of you are that type. Steinke says that that kind of approach to life, will bring us into a healthy place...and will bring health into a community, as well. So there is Wisdom in this marketplace, that we see. And when we embrace it, it helps us look into Scripture--maybe in new ways.

My hope for you, is that you'll continue to be the strong Anglicans that you are...and open your heart to Wisdom that is out there. Who knows...it might be God walking around, --in a dress--...that feminine side of God, that is not afraid of this world, but is all

over the place. Seeking to challenge you, to focus you where you need to be, in your own heart. And in that way, creating a world that is healthy and strong and transformational.