

# Woman Wisdom

A Sermon Expositing Proverbs 1:20-33

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It really isn't the way to get a point across. She had apparently just been waiting for someone to unload on. I was just curious what her take on what's going on in the world was, so I tried to strike up a conversation. She told me that I have a lot to learn about the world. I don't really deny that, but it is a kind of harsh way to enter a conversation with someone you barely know. Almost as soon as the conversation started I just wanted out of it, but I didn't want to return rudeness for rudeness, so there I was. Try as I might to pretend I wasn't offended, I'm no actor and she obviously sensed my irritation. So she raised her voice, told me I wasn't listening. Of course, I wasn't listening, she was basically shouting at me and I was over it. I was looking for a way out of the conversation. It's a shame though. To this day, I want to know what she has to say, but that's just not the way to get a point across.

Maybe one of these days I'll try again to see what she thinks about what's going on in the world. Maybe one of these days I'll try having another conversation with Wisdom. Maybe one of these days she won't be so harsh, so brash, so accusatory. Maybe Woman Wisdom will learn that she'll catch more bees with honey and she'll be nicer, calmer, more rational, easier to talk with and then – then I'll finally hear what she has to say.

This kind of imagined conversation with wisdom personified, I would guess, runs against the grain of how we often think of wisdom in our current culture. Maybe it's just me, but if I were to personify wisdom based on the way I've heard it spoken of in our culture I would probably imagine a gentle and kindly man with a soft voice and graying hair. Graying, because if we believe anything about wisdom in our culture it's that it comes with life experience, with age. Wisdom is elusive, we tend to think, but age gives us more opportunity to encounter it so generally speaking, wisdom comes with age.

But that isn't the image of Wisdom we find in Proverbs today at all. She isn't the least bit elusive! The personification of wisdom that Bob read for us a moment ago is raising her voice! She's out in the streets, at the city center, at the city gates and she's crying out! She's brash and harsh and wants everyone to hear her. She's not elusive at all.

I have to confess, that the more I've reflected on the nature of wisdom, the more I've come to think that Proverbs is right about Woman Wisdom and that Old man Wisdom is just more comfortable for us. If we look into the world and notice a deficit of wisdom – and I think we do – then it is much more comfortable to simply believe that wisdom is just a hard thing to come by than it is to recognize that wisdom is readily available and we just don't receive it. I have to tell you though, I'm beginning to worry that Proverbs has it right, that Woman Wisdom is aching to have her voice heard and we're the ones not hearing it.

Consider some of the greatest causes of concern in our world at the moment. Our planet is overheating, seas rising, extreme weather events increasing in number and severity, species becoming endangered, eco-systems being disrupted. This is the kind of thing for which we might think, "Gee, we sure could use some wisdom to see our way through this." The problem with that thinking though, is that the wisdom is right in front

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Note: Sermon manuscripts are written for the ear rather than the eye. If grammar or punctuation seem unconventional and the meaning unclear, try pronouncing the sentence aloud phonetically.

of us. We know what it will take to slow and stop the problem. Sure there are some details that need ironing out, but we have the science, we have the understanding, but we're moving glacially (pun fully intended) to make changes. Wisdom is not hard to come by, we just haven't embraced it.

In the same way, we know very well the roots of racial disparity in our society. We have the research, we have the knowledge, we have the stories, we even know many of the solutions, and yet we've made so few changes. The wisdom to make the world a better place is there, but we haven't embraced it.

Researching and clinical scientists and doctors have worked night and day to give us a way out of this pandemic. Their knowledge, their compassion, their expertise is right before us in physical form and yet we've struggled to bring the pandemic to an end.

I think I've begun to realize that in these and thousand other ways we're not searching for elusive wisdom to help us deal with these things; it's being shouted out in the streets. We just don't take hold of it, but why?

Because Wisdom isn't always comfortable conversation partner. I'm afraid that we've done to Woman Wisdom exactly what we've done in our society to women in general. Did you hear it in my contrived, but also honest depiction of my conversation with Woman Wisdom a bit ago? Did you hear me say, "That's just really not the way to get a point across?" Then I detailed a conversation in which I got my feelings hurt, I became defensive, I presumed the superior place in the conversation, I felt threatened and I checked out. Then I really did it. Then I told myself that I would be happy to hear what Wisdom has to say, if only she'll learn to make what she's saying palatable to me. Women worshipers among us today, I won't put you on the spot by asking, but I'm guessing that sounds a bit familiar. I'll listen, but only if you say it in a way that doesn't offend, which is to say that I'll listen, but only if you carry all of the responsibility for the emotion in the conversation. This doesn't just take place in conversations between men and women. In our culture people of all genders anticipate women pulling more than their fair share of the emotional labor – and my dear friends, Proverbs is right, Wisdom is a woman.

Think of those few examples we just looked at. The wisdom to change racial disparity is readily available, as is that to curb climate change, and to end a pandemic. Our problem is not that the wisdom isn't readily available to all of us. Our problem is that when this wisdom comes to us it has to say things like, "You've got a lot to learn." It needs to tell us that we've messed up and let us know that we've got big responsibilities ahead. What wisdom has to say about these things often feels pretty threatening. There's a suggestion that for equity and justice to be known in the world, I might have to change the way I do things, that some of what I have might be required of me. Sometimes Wisdom is harsh, friends!

Sometimes Wisdom isn't spoken, it's shouted. Sometimes Wisdom isn't complimentary, it points out our flaws. Sometimes Wisdom is deeply threatening. Sometimes Wisdom comes to us in angry voices. I certainly understand if that seems like harsh news, but friends here's the good news, if we're willing and able to carry the weight of our emotions when Wisdom speaks we're going to learn that Wisdom is everywhere! Amen.