

Meditation

Friday, December 1

In the new year, we will begin a series of meditations on verses taken out of the biblical book of Proverbs. Proverbs are wisdom sayings, and this book is a collection of such sayings out of the wisdom of Ancient Israel. Teachers would use proverbs to teach the young about the nature of true wisdom and how such wisdom is the basis for living a good life.

Who wrote Proverbs? Like many biblical books that are attributed to a special person as a way of honouring something about them reflected in the book, Proverbs is attributed to King Solomon. While everything Solomon did as king was not wise or good, he was believed to have been the wisest of kings during his reign. There is a well known story in the biblical book of Kings (1 Kings 3: 1-15) that tells of a dream Solomon has when he was anointed king at a very young age. In the dream God asks him what he would like most to have as the new king. Rather than riches, success or a long life, Solomon asks for wisdom to govern with fairness and justice for all. And because he asks for wisdom rather than other things most kings would want, God grants him the gift.

It is also said that Solomon's wisdom became so well known that people from all nations came to consult him and hear his wisdom. It is also said that Solomon wrote thousands of proverbs and composed over 1000 songs (1 Kings 4: 29-34). But whether the biblical book of Proverbs is actually written by Solomon or simply inspired by him we cannot know for sure. Here's a sampling from the opening chapter in anticipation of more to come in the new year:

Proverbs 1: 1-7

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

² For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,

³ for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;

⁴ to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—
⁵ let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,
⁶ to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
⁷ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Wisdom in this book is primarily about knowledge on how to live a good life. And the foundation of a good life is “the fear of the Lord.” Unfortunately, fear is not the best translation. Reverence is a much better one. To fear someone and to obey them out of fear is very different than reverencing someone and following what they say because you respect and value what they have to teach you. God is to be revered that way. Imagine living life revering or respecting no one but yourself, your wants and your needs. Isn't someone like this dangerous? On the other hand, someone who is motivated by fear of losing their status, position or money in all they do is also dangerous. Turning our fears into reverence and learning what is worthy of our reverence and what is not are lifelong tasks toward ever greater and deeper wisdom. This is what the book of Proverbs is about.

PRAYER: Grant us wisdom, O God, for we need it every day, in every situation, in every relationship of our lives. Help us not get swallowed up by our fears so that we make bad choices. Teach us reverence and respect for what truly matters: compassion and justice. Give us faith and hope in the wisdom you can grow in us. In Jesus' name; amen.