

## PROVERBS 3: 13-20

- <sup>13</sup> Happy (Blessed) are those who find wisdom,  
and those who get understanding,  
<sup>14</sup> for her income is better than silver,  
and her revenue better than gold.  
<sup>15</sup> She is more precious than jewels,  
and nothing you desire can compare with her.  
<sup>16</sup> Long life is in her right hand;  
in her left hand are riches and honour.  
<sup>17</sup> Her ways are ways of pleasantness (or pleasure and delight),  
and all her paths are peace.  
<sup>18</sup> She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;  
those who hold her fast are called happy.
- <sup>19</sup> The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;  
by understanding God established the heavens;  
<sup>20</sup> by God's knowledge the deeps broke open,  
and the clouds drop down the dew.

The messages in this passage are simple yet profound if we are paying attention not just to the words but to the meanings behind the words.

1) Once again and consistently, wisdom and her cousin understanding are she/her and we will see a bit below the fascinating pairing she/they make with God in the creation of the earth as a kind of birthing.

2) What do people seek most in life? Is it money (silver, gold, riches), material things of value (Jewels), recognition and respect (honour), a long life, pleasure, peace? (14-17) What if true wisdom and understanding can give you so much more than all that? What must happen in us so that we prize wisdom and understanding above all else for our living and flourishing?

3) Wisdom is "the tree of life." (17) Besides several passages in Proverbs, the tree of life appears in Genesis as part of the Garden where the first humans live. There are two special trees, in fact, mentioned in Genesis. There is the tree of life but also the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9). Humans are to eat abundantly from the tree of life but steer clear of the tree of good and evil. (Genesis 2: 16-17) Why? If we follow Proverbs and identify the tree of life with wisdom we can see the meaning. Unless we humans eat sufficiently of the tree of life (wisdom and understanding), we will not be equipped to discern between good and evil and make good choices accordingly. And this is what happens to the first humans (representing common humanity). Without wisdom, knowledge can be a dangerous thing and lead to all kinds of bad choices with bad consequences we could never have imagined in our innocence and ignorance. We need wisdom and understanding to root us like a healthy tree so that the branches that grow out of us through our choices are ones that lead to ever greater flourishing for ourselves and all creation.

How does the imagery of the tree of life as wisdom and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in terms of choices speak to our human lives individually and collectively in terms of choices we have made as humans with our knowledge. Without wisdom and understanding we develop our knowledge in ways that are destructive and dehumanizing because we prize wealth, power and control above the wisdom and understanding that grows knowledge out of love. What do you think?

4) Mentioning the tree of life, of course, leads the author of Proverbs into the theme of creation with some profound reflection in just two verses (19-20). First, to wisdom and understanding is added what is now a third cousin: knowledge. Second, this relationship of knowledge to wisdom and understanding is critical because clearly the kind of knowledge we were talking about here is not the kind that is information and skill that will generate more riches, recognition, power and pleasure. No. Rather the knowledge that grows out of wisdom and understanding is about learning to make good choices and learning the kind of creativity that feeds new life.

But there's one more message, I believe, in these two verses. The wisdom, understanding and knowledge that comes forth out of God to create the world is also built into creation. We cannot see or know God directly. We know God through God's Word (John 1) which speaks creation into being and God's wisdom which gives birth to creation. This means that even as we see something of God's heart as we look at Jesus (the Word made flesh), we also see something of God's mind as we learn wisdom for our own living and flourishing by learning about and connecting with the natural world. If love is in our heart, the knowing we cultivate with our minds about creation will teach us about how we may better live in all our relations.

Isn't this all fascinating? What do you think?

PRAYER: Come to us, O God, through your Word and through your Wisdom. Create in us and give birth in us to your love, so that we grow the kind of understanding and knowledge that grows out of love. As we approach other people and mother earth all around us, may love growing in us teach us to care by listening and learning what others need from us and may give to us. May we understand that as they flourish in relation to us we, too, will flourish. Amen.