

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House  
May 30, 2010

Sophia: She was the first of creations...  
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I saw the play *The Man of La Mancha* at the Anta Theater in New York, one of the first theaters in the round. Starring Richard Kiley and based on the book by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra from the early 1600's, the work is considered by many to be the first modern novel ever written. It was also the first play I had ever seen (been smitten ever since) and helped propel me forward in making Spanish my major in college, later reading the work in its original language.

In the beginning of the play, the narrator opens with these words:

Come, enter into my imagination and see him!

His name... Alonso Quijana... a country squire, no longer young... bony, hollow-faced... eyes that burn with the fire of inner vision.

Being retired, he has much time for books. He studies them from morn to night and often through the night as well.

And all he reads oppresses him... fills him with indignation at man's murderous ways toward man. And he conceives the strangest project ever imagined...

to become a knight-errant and sally forth into the world to right all wrongs.

No longer shall he be plain Alonso Quijana...

but a dauntless knight known as *Don Quixote de La Mancha*!

A knight-errant is a knight who wanders or roams the land in search of adventure to prove himself a knight. The first knight-errant was in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century tale Sir Gawain an the Green Knight.

And, on day's like today, I have a collision of the same thought that could easily form both sides of a coin:

“Wouldn’t it be great to have a knight-errant out there today to right all wrongs?”

“Who in their right mind would want to be a knight-errant in this world to right all wrongs?”

Therein is the tension in the story of Don Quixote de la Mancha, and therein lies the tension of his times and ours.

One wonders, if in fact, being wise means being a little daft, a little oblivious or maybe impervious to the slings and arrows of others on the road to righting wrongs.

In today’s readings, we began with verses from the Hebrew Bible (the Ketuvim or Book of Writings)<sup>1</sup> and The Book of Proverbs. This Book is referred to as part of the *wisdom literature*, along with The Book of Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and certain psalms.

Proverbs is mapped out in a way that compares and contrasts the wise person with the fool, fool being one lacking in morality and uninterested in correction. Wisdom is held up as something that is important to attain, and is personified as being with God before all creation.

The writer of Proverbs, maybe Solomon – maybe not, has Wisdom (Sophia) addressing us:

God created me at the beginning of God’s work, the first of God’s acts long ago.

If you can set aside the “how” God does such things (any things, for that matter), think of God in the Great Void a place without specification – much different from emptiness – think of God and Wisdom.

If that does not produce any clarity about Wisdom, God, or where I am going...don’t be concerned.

I found this quote on Wikipedia about Plato, Socrates, and Wisdom:

[Plato](#)’s dialogues mention the virtue of wisdom, as knowledge about the Good and the [courage](#) to act accordingly. The [Good](#) would be about the right relations between all that exists. The Good, as a Platonic [Form](#), would involve the perfect ideas of good government, love, friendship, community, and a right relation to the Divine. Perhaps the search or love of wisdom is more important than any proven claim. Socrates only claimed to know that he did not know, but this he was very certain of, and he showed the many contradictions in the claims of his fellow citizens.<sup>[2]</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Torah](#) ("Teaching"), [Nevi'im](#) ("Prophets"), and [Ketuvim](#) ("Writings"), - Tanakh

Reminds me of a line from the British sitcom, in which blue-haired Mrs. Slocum frequently punctuates every statement of conviction in the plural with: "And we are unanimous in that"

Both produce, a sort of "Huh?!"

And the "Huh" is right. Right as a question and a statement.

Wisdom will ultimately be part of what you and I come to know of God, within a broad stroke or arc of being:

From before there was anything, to the aeons of now, and to the bookends of Wisdom and God following what is. And as we discussed over the last few weeks, these things are not on timelines like some sort of schedule on the soon to come Second Avenue Subway.

The phases or universes exist all at once, now, here, there, here again – just as God exists all at once in God, Spirit, Jesus – the Trinity in our beliefs, that is broader than three or any number to describe how the God of Many Ways can be itemized.

God can't be itemized.

Your wisdom, my wisdom, will ultimately be how it is we know God and how we enter into Socrates' state of being "very certain we don't know" all there is about God to know.

So, God created Wisdom first and then the rest of creation...

In all of creation is God and Wisdom...

So, as one preacher described it in a sermon:

Do we deliberately take notice of God's creation for the purpose of accumulating knowledge, understanding, and wisdom in order to enhance our relationship with God? Do we take notice of God's creation in order to understand a bit more about God's greatness and to be more appreciative of the life God has called us to...

Or do we not?

We do both, again. Sometimes, though, we might do a little more in the wrong direction, though.

Today, we mark day 40 in the oil leak in the Gulf, the largest spill in U.S. history – 40 million barrels of oil are estimated to be spilled, will be spilled, no one really knows the devastation.

Was there wisdom in the decisions of those who made, constructed, operated, devised the studies, rigs, and drilling? Was this a “deliberate” attempt to “take notice” of God’s creation for the purpose of accumulating knowledge, understanding, and wisdom in order to enhance our relationship with God?

Of course not. It was about demand, business to support that demand, and profit. Is there any wisdom in depleting our natural resources, under any conditions?

There is another proverb, a native American proverb that says:

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

It seems that this is one time, among many, where we have paid forward disappointment and scarcity to our children from the dismissal of wisdom and abundance of our God.

In an essay published in April 1990: Word & Flesh: What Are People For?, and with the Exxon Valdez fresh on his mind, along with the fact that the Captain admitted to consuming three alcoholic beverages before boarding ship and striking a reef in Prince William Sound in March 1989, dumping 11,000,000 gallons of crude oil into the Sound, Wendell Berry had this to say:

“If you put the fates of whole communities or cities or regions or ecosystems at risk in single ships or factories or power-plants, then I will furnish the drunk or fool or imbecile who will make the necessary small mistake.” That may be a “mistake” in construction, or an engineering mistake, or a steering mistake or any of the sorts of mistakes endemic to the complex technological systems that compose our life-support systems.

It would seem that Wendell Berry had something to say, then and now.

There is a question that occurs to me: Can there be wisdom without God?

Knowledge, discovery, intelligence, designs, marvels, iPads and more...but wisdom?

As churches do often, we constantly review our mission and operation: our purpose. I have come to believe that church and business are incompatible. There can be no business of the church. Whatever appears to be business to the outside or unaided eyes must be a faithful and pastoral application of the faith and tradition to which we commit ourselves.

We use language, but we don't describe ourselves as university,  
We use music, but we don't describe ourselves as a studio  
We serve food, but do not describe ourselves as a café  
We use good business practices, so why describe ourselves as a  
business...

There is no alternative to finding God in our lives and then helping others to do the same through these and other ways. It is what will lead us to the place of wisdom, there is no other path: Proverbs:

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live."

This was and is Jesus. This was and is the power of Jesus: he embodied this wisdom, he was and is embodied in the uproar of God who wants to know and be known, to paraphrase C.G. Jung.

Listen, again, to Jesus' words as described by John:

When the Spirit of truth comes, it will guide you into all the truth; for it will not speak on its own, but will speak whatever it hears, and it will declare to you the things that are to come.

The things to come...

The next right things to do ...

On a day that remembers the sacrifice of the women and men and their families who have felt the devastation of loss in the violence of war, every way, it seems that from global and political directions, we are a world without wisdom.

In John 18:36 Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world..."

It could be, though...if the world got it right.

In Luke 20:25 Jesus says to the who challenge him about payments to civil authorities, "...give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's..."

It all could be of God's ... if the world were unanimous in that!

It's why we don't despair. "Be not afraid:

Ezekiel 2:6: And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions

Jeremiah 42:11: Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him saith the Lord, for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you

Acts 18:9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace...

Matthew 10:28

And be not afraid of them that kill the body but are unable to kill the soul...

To Mary, Isaiah, Joshua, and us...be not afraid

And to one Knight-errant,

In the end, Quixote was broken physically and thought to be mad by some. Yet, those around him who thought him folly found something else as he lay dying. They found someone who helped them know wisdom in the astonishing courage of a madman...

Let us be not afraid and seek the wisdom of God and knowing God...wherever it leads...

And then let us tell the world, for the world is in great need of such things.

Amen.