

Teenagers, Lions, and Leviathans...Oh My! V2

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. ²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. ²⁶ There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. ²⁷ These all look to you to give them their food in due season; ²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. ³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works-- ³² who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. ³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. ³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD. ³⁵ Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD!

It's not easy to be a mom. I understand this better today than I did when I was younger. Those of you with us last Sunday heard about my tribulations with high school band, and how I chose to leave. Well after I left, I just went down the hall to the theater room and became involved over there- my favorite thing being the senior directed one act plays.

Every year in the Spring each theater senior was allowed to assemble a cast and select a scene and after a month and a half of rehearsals we have a one act night with every ensemble competing for best play, best actor, you name it. It was a big deal, we had a class size around 500, and we ended up being able to put on 10 to 12 one act plays including anywhere from 40-50 kids each year. And Mrs. Patterson, the theater teacher hired theater professors from local colleges to come in and judge the competition. And as far as us kids went- we absolutely threw ourselves into these productions.

My junior year was the first year I participated, and it was an incredible experience. I played the lead as part of a large cast in an ambitious one act version of a play called God's Country, about a neo-nazi group here in the Pacific Northwest known as The Order. The Order was most famous for assassinating Alan Berg, a liberal Jewish radio host in Denver, Colorado in 1984. The founder of the group, and the character I got to play, fun fun, was named Robert Matthews. He ended up dying on Whidbey Island up in Washington in a fire during a shoot out with federal agents. To this day he is still considered a hero and martyr for hate groups around the country. He was very much an inspiration to Timothy McVeigh, who planned and carried out the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.

Well, it was a powerful play. We learned a lot. And we did a great job. Our ensemble won that year for best play. And we were high as kites on our success. We had our cast party all planned out. The next night, a Friday night, everyone was going to come over to my house and everyone would crash at Ken's it being like a party/sleepover. And one of the seniors...well let's just say he mentioned he might be able to get his hands on a bottle or two of an adult nature to bring along.

So, before folks were coming over for the party, I started making these huge batches of cool aid. My mom noticed this, but said nothing. We hadn't had cool aid in the house since I was like 10 maybe, but who knows. But then, I remember sitting with my mom watching TV and slicing fruit. Now, if cool aid was a little strange...fruit slicing was definitely a weird thing for me to be doing. In fact up to that point in my life, I'm fairly sure I had never actually cut into a lime, ever. But there on my cutting board was all this fruit, and I was just merrily cutting it all up like nothing's going on. And my

mom was kind of watching TV and then looking over at me. And she kept looking back and forth until finally, she asked, “So ah, whatcha doing with the fruit? Trying to act cool I said, “Oh, I’m just cutting some fruit for the party. For the cool aid.” I thought that was a pretty good response. My mom let a moment or so pass, before she made her devastating follow up. “So, are you thinking of putting anything else in the cool aid?” And I just looked up, like a deer caught in headlights, my face telling the whole story. “Anything else?” I said in an incredibly pathetic attempt to seem innocent. “Yeah, are you planning on having, oh I don’t know, alcohol at this party?” And I was stunned. I honestly had no idea my mom would make this connection. Looking back on it now, I’m amazed at how little credit I gave her- it’s like I thought my mom hadn’t lived through the 60’s or ever been to college or ever been a kid up to no good. Theater kids, cool aid, and fruit. I mean else on EARTH could I have been up to? But I thought I was playing it real cool.

Well, there was no use lying at that point. So I told her Eric Walker had some connection somewhere, an older brother or something, and he was bringing us a bottle of the very finest everclear for our bacchanalian fest. I didn’t know it at the time, but everclear is about as palatable as paint thinner, but we were excited. And I told her I was planning on filling a cooler or two up with this fantastic cool aid, this mangled fruit, and the everclear and everything would be fine.

Of course my mom didn’t see it quite like I did. And we immediately started to fight. My mom played the exasperated role of the parent both insulted and dumbfounded that her kid would think he could get away with something like this, and me saying first that it wasn’t fair, and when that wasn’t working saying fine, we were all 17 and 18, and

if we couldn't have it here than we'd just have it some other time, because she couldn't ground me for life.

It's not easy being a mom- being in control of someone and yet also knowing this person has to become responsible for their own life at some point. You can't be so strict kids live in a bubble, but you can't be so easy they can get away with anything.

If there's anyone who understands this, if there's anyone who understands this crazy desire to embrace and strangle at the same time, this dance of being in charge of someone while trying to figure out how set them free; it's God. It's what we see in our Psalm this morning. And, according to the Psalm, God faces it as a mother.

In the very first line this morning the Psalmist says in wisdom you have made it all, the earth is full of your creatures. Now in English wisdom is a kind of neutral word- a way of kind of complimenting God. O God, you've created everything, and you did it so wisely. It's like we're saying God didn't just throw everything together at the last minute, but planned things really well- laid everything out really thoughtfully. And of course there is truth to this, wisdom in Hebrew does imply order. And anyone even remotely familiar with physics, you know that if the earth were just a fraction closer to the sun or farther, or if we were tilted just a hair of a degree more or less- life as we know it would cease to be. There certainly is an order in creation and a deep wisdom in this ordering.

But in both Hebrew and Greek, wisdom has a much, much more important meaning than just intelligence and strategic planning. In both Hebrew and Greek wisdom isn't an attribute- it's a name, and it's the name of a person. Known as *Hokmah* in Hebrew, and *Sophia* in Greek- the term wisdom refers to a very special name for the person, the woman, through whom God gave birth to the universe.

Don't believe me? Well, this is one of those times a thorough knowledge of the Bible is key. In Proverbs woman wisdom, or *Hokmah*, or *Sophia*, speaks in Chapter 8 saying, "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth...when he marked out the foundations of the earth, I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight." Job tells us that God alone knows where she lives and knows the way to her. (Job 28.23) In the Wisdom of Solomon, a book respected by protestants and revered by others, we hear that Wisdom is one and that she can do all things and is the maker of all things and the mother of all that is good. Indeed, according to the Wisdom of Solomon, and I quote: "The paths on earth were set right, and people were taught, and were saved by Woman Wisdom."

And it isn't just Old Testament stuff, either. Jesus spoke of *Hokmah*, of *Sophia*, as well. When he was being criticized by people for being too worldly he said, "When John came and didn't drink, you said he had a demon. And when I came eating and drinking, you call me a glutton. But I tell you, Wisdom, Sophia, will be vindicated by her children." What he's doing is claiming Sophia as his mother- saying he and John are her children. And she isn't just full of sugar and spice and everything nice, either. Later, when the Pharisees were attacking him he quotes her again saying saying,

“Wisdom/Sophia, says: ‘I will send them prophets and apostles whom they will kill and persecute, so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets.’”

Whenever you come across the word wisdom in scripture, yes wisdom is an attribute anyone might possess, but more important than this, wisdom is a person, a manifestation of God. And this is why although it can make some folks uncomfortable to speak of God as mother, this isn't something new fangled we do because of the equal rights amendment- this is something we do because it's how Holy Scripture speaks of God. God is our father, absolutely, But, at least in the person of Sophia, God is also our mother, and as creator, God knows the same pain we know as caregivers being charged with providing for others AND with making sure they have the freedom to make their own mistakes.

You see this in the Psalm this morning. This entire Psalm is a hymn to creation. It's full of absolute joy over all the things God has made through woman wisdom. Earlier in the Psalm the Psalmist gives thanks for the springs the gush forth in the desert, and for the abundance of food, and the grapes that make the wine he says that gladdens the human heart. He's thankful for the detail of creation- for the nests of birds, the rocky homes of the coneys, a kind of rabbit that's extinct now, and the mountains for the wild goats. In short for everything!

Except, like in Luke, Woman Wisdom isn't all nicey, nicey about creation. In the middle of this joyous song, the Psalmist jangles out a few dark notes. Right before the passage we read the Psalmist talks about the young lions roaring in the night. Lions were an absolute terror to the people of the middle east, being at the top of the food chain and

hunting at night when people were least prepared. For anyone hearing this Psalm, lions would not have been a nice thing, a pleasant thing to hear about. And even more frightening than this is the image we get in the second verse this morning- the Leviathan. The Jews imagined Leviathan as this enormous sea monster who terrorized the oceans. For the Jews Leviathan was more than this, it was a kind of symbol of every dark, wild, and uncontrollable force you could imagine- a Hebrew boogeyman, if you will. Again, not something you'd add to creation if you were trying to make it a nice place, a completely safe place. And of course at the very end of the psalm, the psalmist cries out about the ones causing so much pain to everyone around them, the wicked, wishing that they might one day be no more. But of course this is just a hope- the reality the Psalmist lives with is these folks, who, whether they mean to or not, are making life hell for everyone around them- and they are very much a part of this creation.

So what's the meaning of all this? Well, if God were a gardener, God would not give us a French garden, with perfect symmetry and everything neat and in it's place, God has given us an English garden- with wild things and wildness itself allowed to thrive. Creation, in other words, is full of breath taking beauty, of incredible bounty and blessing, fields and vineyards, the glory of the sun and the moon. And...creation is full of teenagers, lions, leviathans, and people who seem to almost enjoy causing pain. Creation isn't *your* neatly mown lawn, it's that neighbor down the street's horrible dandy lion filled mess! It's full of it all, and God through woman wisdom takes the risk of setting us down in the midst of it all, free to make our way.

But of course God doesn't just set us down alone in all this. God gives us the spirit, in Hebrew the *ruach*, another feminine word, mind you. God is present to us in the spirit, this same spirit that gives birth to the church we celebrate today. And maybe this spirit isn't as tangible as we'd like sometimes, for whether we experience it in the world or in the church God certainly is not getting rid of everything going wrong. But I don't believe this means God's spirit isn't with us, I think it means God is simply a good mother. For in the spirit God is present to us, while at the same time allowing us freedom of making our own choices, of making our own way in this wild place.

Well, after my mom and I went a few rounds, my mom did something that completely shocked me. Looking just lonely, and exhausted and beside herself, she did something I never expected. She told me she was angry with me for putting her in this spot, but that she realized if the party wasn't here it would just go somewhere else. So she asked me to think about it from her perspective for a minute. She asked me to think about how we might have the party but in a way that was reasonably safe. She asked me, in other words, to grow up a little bit, to think like an adult, and to think about what might happen. And I did. And after a little while, this is what we agreed to: A) No one who decided to come could leave- all car keys being given to my mom. B) Mom had final say over the vile brew. C) And this would never, ever, ever happen again.

Now, in the cold light of day, this probably still wasn't a great idea. And if my mom wasn't trying to parent all alone and had some support, she probably would have put her foot down more. But I think she did great. And fortunately, we were really only wild and crazy in our own minds. We did make two big coolers of the horrible stuff, but

it was really pretty bad, and we barely made a dent in it. We had to dump it out the next day giving whatever lived in the North Texas sewer system a jolt, I'm sure. And all in all, the kids were amazingly well behaved. No one tried to leave. We even got some sleep. The only down side is none of my friends would let me complain about my mom ever again.

Friends, in wisdom God made the world good. Not safe. Good. And it seems that God has left it up to us to make it beautiful. This day, this week- may we be as beautiful as God, through Sophia, through the church, and through our moms, has made us to be. **Amen.**