



Reflection from Joan DeMerchant

Wisdom in A Brutalizing Time

There she is, the text tells us, sitting at the gate: Lady Wisdom, waiting eagerly to be found by those who seek her. She makes her rounds looking for those who are “worthy of her.” It sounds like discovering wisdom is easy...all you have to do is search (and be prudent).

I haven't had an easy time of it. I've prayed for wisdom in difficult circumstances, and sometimes made wise choices. But not consistently. As an elder, you'd think I'd cemented our relationship long ago...that wisdom would be there whenever needed. But, no. And when I look at the world around me, I wonder how much wisdom is actually ever at play out there: in families, in the workplace, in the church, in politics (local, national or international). David Brooks wrote recently in a New York Times article that “We're living in a brutalizing time.” “...the crust of civilization is thin.” We understand and feel this. We could sure use wisdom now....

Today's Gospel is also about the wisdom of preparedness. The story is a metaphor for being ready for Christ's return and the need to be awake, on the alert for the unexpected. The work isn't easy. How do we do this without living in fear? Without losing hope? Without being cynical? How long do we wait for this? Haven't people been doing that for a couple of thousand years now? Is it actually going to happen, and how in the heck can we prepare for it?

In the meantime, there are so many other things--that seem more immediate--to be prepared for. They're all connected to what we've called the Kingdom, the Reign of God and Jesus' Second Coming, in the sense of creating an environment of peace, justice, love and preservation of this precious planet. These require a kind of preparedness that isn't about anxiety or nail-biting or unbending control. These take new, different ways of thinking that only wisdom can bring.

I think we know intuitively what wisdom isn't, from current events. It isn't “safe rooms”, locks and bolts, Iron Domes, razor-wire fences, floodlights, border walls, elaborate security systems, refugee camps, ignoring climate change signs. Wisdom requires a kind of vulnerability that seems counter-intuitive, feminine and even un-American. To get there, we need to approach Wisdom like an old friend and say to her: “Are you there? It's me/us again. I/we need you.” To which I'm sure she will reply, “Ah...I've missed you. I thought you'd never ask.”

To the search,

Joan