

*Based on Proverbs 8. Wisdom at the Crossroads*

*Background on Lady Wisdom: The Book of Proverbs tells us Wisdom is present in Creation, a co-worker with God in this marvelous wonder that is our world. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians tells us Wisdom incarnates in the life of Jesus. The Apocryphal texts preserved in the Roman Catholic Bible but removed during the Protestant Reformation tell us Wisdom is an all-powerful spirit, overseeing all, and penetrating through all. As such, Divine Wisdom is embedded within all three persons of the Trinity: as Creation, as Incarnation, as the Spirit that binds all things as One. This Trinitarian Divine Wisdom is the original they/them, a Fathering, Mothering, Non-binary parenting God, delighting in the human race. As the Wisdom of God delights in us, we gather in turn to delight in Divine Wisdom.*

The bumper sticker goes something like this:

*God's original plan was to hang out in a garden with some naked vegetarians.*

Sounds idyllic, right?

Swinging in a hammock, sipping cinnamon bark tea, plucking Sunday brunch from whatever plant happens to appears on the part of the path we happen to plod today.

A brilliant plan unfolding from a brilliant cosmic Wisdom. A beautiful creation pronounced good by the One who created it. *The witchery of living*, as our poet describes ... *through this day, and maybe another, and maybe still another.*

Abundant Life, in all of its fullness. A constant presence of provision filled with love, joy, peace, gratitude. This is the original plan: delight, wonder, awe, play.

Instead we know evil as well as good.

We know the corruption of this good creation, distorted and defiled. Biblical theologians tell us evil abandons the Wisdom embedded in this good Creation and twists it instead for self-fulfilling autocratic purposes.

Evil, I am afraid, is what we are facing today.

ICE raids on Home Depots and car washes out of lust for power. Canadian wildfires and the repeal of electric vehicle mandates out of spite. Threats to health care and food security out of greed.

Today we are facing, as Margaret Wheatley defines evil: *intentional cruelty that enjoys the impact of that cruelty*.

To be clear, because so many of us have heard it wrong, we do not get to blame the feminine for the knowledge of evil, based on a misreading of Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve and an apple and a snake. On the contrary, here in Proverbs 8, Lady Wisdom, herself, stands at the crossroads, calling at the gate, bidding men and women and nonbinary alike to join her in detesting evil and falsehood and deceit.

To be clear, because we are not accustomed to hearing sermons about Lady Wisdom in twenty-first century Christian churches, She is calling us to *prophetic public witness* in the face of such evil.

*The gate* in the biblical world is the central location for community interaction, legal proceedings, and public announcements. *The gate* is where decisions affecting the body politic are made, where community values are aired out in the sun. *The gate* is the Halls of Congress or the Shepherdstown Town Hall or The Department of Homeland Security. *The gate* is anywhere public discourse and communal decision-making takes place with and for the people. *The gate* is where Lady Wisdom cries out, *by the hand of the gate*, the Hebrew literally says, insisting the people live rightly and do justly as they gather and deliberate and decide how to proceed.

Likewise, *the crossroad* in the biblical world is a central location in the heart of the city. *The crossroad* is an intersection of traffic from multiple directions, a strategic location of heightened influence. *The crossroad* is King Street and German Street in Shepherdstown or the 4-way stop or King Street and Queen Street in Martinsburg. *The crossroad* is a turning point of decision and transition. *The crossroad* is where Lady Wisdom stands, forcing the people to see her and hear her even if they would rather just make their way quietly to the grocery store on a Saturday afternoon.

To be clear, Lady Wisdom is not neutral!

She has no truck with *both-sides-ism*. She cares nothing of being labeled *too strident* or *too radical* or *too woke* or *too political*. The slur used to silence women throughout history - *the b word* - rolls off her back like so much water.

Lady Wisdom cares instead about justice and integrity and Life in all of its fullness. She cares about you and she cares about me and she cares about the path you and I will choose together at this crossroads moment in history.

Because we are at a crossroads in history.

Lady Wisdom insists we are not partisan to speak of this crossroads moment in the pulpit. Instead we are

prudent to do so. Project 2025 has made their plans plain. The marines in Los Angeles is by design, not by circumstance. The gutting of the civil service is a strategy, not the whim of a tech billionaire. Mass deportations are in service to Christian white nationalism, not the outcry of legitimate grief over a small amount of crime by a few undocumented immigrants. These plans are decades in the making, waiting for a moment to strike.

They are striking.

You may remember the Shepherdstown Ministerial Association brought the noted Appalachian novelist and Episcopal priest, Denise Giardina, to Shepherdstown in the Season of Lent to share her insight into our present moment. Based on eight years of research into the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (German theologian, pastor, and Nazi resister) and the rise of Nazi Germany, Giardina's wisdom was clear. We are at a crossroads.

This is 1933 Germany.

It could go either way.

I do not say this to stoke further fear in our souls. I do not say this to inspire an intellectual academic debate over the differences between the current American civic structure and the historic German one and how the rise of authoritarianism will necessarily happen differently here. (It will and it is.) I do not say this to promote any political party over another. I have made it as clear as I can to anyone who will listen that I am personally politically unaffiliated and that I preach The Way of Jesus - which is The Way of Wisdom Incarnate - to the best of my ability, always acknowledging the limitations of my perspective. (Well, as often as I can.)

Denise Giardina, herself, reminds us that the allegiance of the Christian must always be first and foremost to Jesus Christ. I will remind us this as well. Beyond any political party, beyond any national identity, our allegiance first and foremost must always be to Jesus Christ.

I say this to insist, in the Way and Spirit of Jesus, that Divine Wisdom is not locked inside a church or a seminary or the privacy of our own homes or our cars or the places we go to hide when we are afraid. Divine Wisdom is in the streets with the protestors. And, dare I say, Divine Wisdom is in the streets with the National Guard and the Marines who are trying to figure out how to be faithful, even as they are called up like pawns in the promotion of this evil. Divine Wisdom is shadowing the immigrants who have been forced into hiding and marching with the saints and calling our Senators and risking everything to remain human in this inhumane time.

I say this also to insist that Divine Wisdom has been here before. Birthed before the hills. Older than every empire. Older than humanity itself. Braided into our very breath.

Wisdom knows what to do.

Our job is to follow her.

I say this also to insist that Divine Wisdom welcomes our new members today not as names to be added to the roster to make ourselves feel better (although it feels GREAT!), but as co-workers for a New Creation here at the crossroads, dancing and singing and praising, and delighting, as she always has, in the whole human race.

Our Scriptures insist we can be a New Creation, in the Spirit of Wisdom, in the Way of Jesus, with a river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God, and a tree on both sides of the river, bearing fruit in all seasons. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Including ours.

At the crossroad, alongside the gate, swinging in a hammock, sipping cinnamon bark tea, and plucking Sunday brunch from whatever plant happens to appear on the part of the path we happen to plod today, our job is to seek the ways of Wisdom, bidding us to work for justice, freedom, and love.

And in seeking her, we trust she has *already* found us!