

1 September 2024

Proverbs 8:1-13  
1 Corinthians 3:11-17  
Matthew 5:1-12

*Does not Wisdom call out?*

*Does not Understanding raise her voice?<sup>1</sup>*

*At the highest points along the way, at the places chosen for palaces or temples, she takes her stand.*

*Where the paths meet, where lives intersect, where deals both legitimate and shady are done, there she makes her presence felt.*

*Beside the gate leading into the city, where people congregate to hear the latest news and to debate politics, where townsfolk encounter outsiders, where disputes are settled, where people are welcomed in or cast out, at the place where the elders gather to make plans for the welfare of the city, there she cries aloud.*

*'To you, O people, I call out;*

*I raise my voice to all humanity, to every one of you in whatever place you find yourself, in the midst of all the potential distractions of life. I commend myself to each one of you.*

*'And to you who are determined to remain simple, those who have not heeded me, those who have ignore my advice, those who wilfully or carelessly go their own way, I say "Pay attention and gain prudence, learn how to behave, set your feet on the path to right-standing with God and humankind."*

In the book of Proverbs the virtue of wisdom is personified as a woman. In this book wisdom is no abstract concept; in being personified as a woman, we are encouraged to recognise wisdom as something embodied, something that is for *living*. And that makes sense, for nothing is truly *known* until it is lived out in the everyday world.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, Proverbs 8 describes Wisdom, this attribute or aspect of God, as being present in the commonplace, in the practices and habits, in all the murkiness of the

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<sup>1</sup> The following amplification of Proverbs 8:1-5 owes much to Ekblad, "Wisdom calls"; Strollo "Commentary", and Atkinson *Proverbs* pp.31, 44-45

<sup>2</sup> See Atkinson, *Proverbs*, p.30; see also Brueggemann, *Theology*, pp.342-344

everyday life and culture of these people of Old Testament times of about three-thousand years ago.

And also significantly Proverbs 8 tells us that the Wisdom of God is seeking those who up till now have ignored or rejected her.

Wisdom presents her hearers with a challenge. There are choices to be made. There is the way of folly, of refusing reverent obedience to God: the end of that road is deafness, deadness and disaster. Or there is Wisdom's way, bringing the public realm, the choices, and the importance of evaluating between different priorities and different paths, into the light of God.<sup>3</sup>

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*Does not Wisdom call out?*

*Does not Understanding raise her voice?*

*To the prophet Toiroa, to the social reformers of the Clapham Sect, and to the scientific rationalists; on sailing vessels of trade and exploration; at the places chosen to establish mission stations; at the places selected for settlement in a new land, she takes her stand.*

*Where the paths meet; where tangata whenua and settlers' lives intersect; where muskets, flax, blankets and land are traded; where deals both legitimate and shady are done, there she makes her presence felt.*

*Beside the gates of marae and settlements, pā and stockades; where people congregate to hear the latest news; where rights are argued and defended; where leaders gather to make plans for invasion or peace; where a Treaty is made and breached, there she cries aloud.*

*'To you, O people, I call out;*

*I raise my voice to all humanity'.*

Today is held as the feast of the Builders of the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. In the reference book *For All the Saints*, Ken Booth gives the following explanation for the feast:

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<sup>3</sup> Atkinson, 32

“A number of significant people in the history of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia are remembered individually in the Calendar, but the growth of the church in the South Pacific owes a very great deal as well to many, many others, who by their faithful service and enthusiastic support have shaped the church that we have inherited.

“The initial shape was given by the members of the Church Missionary Society, whose work among the Māori people laid the foundations of Christianity among many of the tribes. The work of the Church Missionary Society lasted beyond 1840, but faded significantly during the wars of the 1860s. The missionaries were ably assisted in many cases by their wives, who toiled and laboured alongside them.

“The next major development involved those who helped the formation of the church in the new settler colonies. These people were intent on establishing their familiar church in a new land, but without the English connection with the state. A focus as always was The Book of Common Prayer, or its Māori translation, Te Rāwiri. Along with that went the hymns and music of the Church of England.”<sup>4</sup>

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*Does not Wisdom call out?*

*Does not Understanding raise her voice?*

*At the prominent intersection of Terrace and Broad Streets, she takes her stand.*

*Where lives intersect, at work in the gravel pits, brick kiln, gas works, and flour mill; in constructing roads and railway and building new houses; among cemetery plots divided by denomination and wealth; at places where wheeling and dealing is done; in the homes and halls and brand-new church buildings in which people gather for worship, there she makes her presence felt.*

*Where people congregate to debate the shape of town development; in newly formed recreational and social clubs; at the school gate and at the general store; in the Council chamber, Court House, and Charitable Aid Board sessions; there she cries aloud.*

*‘To you, O people, I call out;*

*I raise my voice to all humanity.’*

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Booth, *For All the Saints*, p.598.

Picking up Ken Booth's narrative from where we left off earlier:

"The next generation was dominated by the work of establishing parishes and churches. Parishioners raised funds to erect buildings, mostly in the familiar style of the nineteenth century Gothic revival, and they provided for the plant and equipment for the many activities of the church."<sup>5</sup>

It was in this period that the parish of St Peter came to be established. Initially this was a mission endeavour of the All Saints' parish that covered the whole area, and was a response to the need to provide accessible worship to the growing population up this end of town. The church responded to a significant need for education of the young, and for keeping the youth of the day in productive and honest activity. The church also playing an important role in the social fabric of the community.

In the early years, private homes were used for worship and schooling, and later church rooms were erected. By the beginning of 1900s a major fundraising effort was under way to purchase land, build a dedicated church building, and to provide a stipend for a clergyman. Many people generously responded – not only with cash, but also with their goods, services and labour.

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*Does not Wisdom call out?*

*Does not Understanding raise her voice?*

*At the landmarks, at St Peter's, the hospital, Memorial Park, the airport, she takes her stand.*

*Where lives intersect, in the shops of Broadtop and Midway; at the Saturday market and at the Community Leisure Centre; in the restaurants, cafes, and bars; in medical rooms and lawyers' and accountants' offices; where life is transacted, there she makes her presence felt.*

*Among the residents, Maori, Pakeha, Polynesian, Asian, African; in the places they reside, Moheke Ave and Cloake Way, in motels and in the Women's Refuge, on the streets or in cars and vans; at the Police Station and in counsellors' rooms; on the pages of the web and in social media accounts; there she cries aloud.*

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<sup>5</sup> Ken Booth, *For All the Saints*, p.598.

*'To you, O people, I call out;  
I raise my voice to all humanity'.*

Beyond the paragraphs already quoted, Ken Booth goes on to describe various changes and initiatives over the decades, the ebbs and flows of the development of the Anglican church as we know it in this part of the world. He concludes his survey with these words:

“Thus, the work of individuals and groups has built up the church, and it has developed a distinctive style among the churches of the Anglican Communion.”<sup>6</sup>

As we celebrate the many people who have gone before us in forming the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, and in forming the parish of St Peter's Palmerston North within it, we do well to remember that the church has had to constantly adapt itself to the changing needs of the community we serve. In every age and place, the wisdom of God raises her voice to all of humanity, to every kind of person, in every kind of situation. We, the church here and now, need to heed Wisdom's call to *us*, to guide us as we reach into these changing circumstances and needs, remembering that wisdom is both divine revelation about God and also about human beings.<sup>7</sup> And we need to remember too that Wisdom is not just about right ideas, but right living, right action.

And, at the same time, we have to recognise that we are also agents and mouthpieces of that same Wisdom, making God's plea to all of humanity. What do we see going on in the high places, crossroads, and city gates of our city and suburb today? How do we make Wisdom intelligible to the people that inhabit these places and to the needs we see around us?

Paul states emphatically that no-one can lay a foundation other than Christ. While he made the statement as he argued for unity rather than division within the Church, the phrase is also a good reminder of our need to ensure that we are *led by Christ alone*, following his insight and working according to his purposes. And that then is an encouragement to *prayer*. Let us all be praying day by day for wisdom for us, for

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<sup>6</sup> Ken Booth, *For All the Saints*, p.599

<sup>7</sup> Ekblad, “Wisdom calls”, with reference to 1 Corinthians 2:10-11

our church in this city and throughout this land. Let us be praying so that we too may build on the foundation that is Christ, continue the legacy of the builders of the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia we honour today, and grow Christ's church in numbers, in spiritual commitment to God, and in service to our local community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> From the prayer for growth of the "Leading Your Church Into Growth" course.