

A Simple Song about Wisdom
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Easter (Jubilate)
Sermon Text: Proverbs 8:22-36

"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of old. ²³Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, ²⁶before He had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. ²⁷When He established the heavens, I was there; when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸when He made firm the skies above, when He established the fountains of the deep, ²⁹when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰then I was beside Him, like a master workman, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always, ³¹rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the children of man. ³²"And now, O sons, listen to Me: blessed are those who keep My ways. ³³Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. ³⁴Blessed is the one who listens to Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting beside My doors. ³⁵For whoever finds Me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, ³⁶but he who fails to find Me injures himself; all who hate Me love death."

The Persian poet, Hafez, meditated for a long time about the meaning of existence. In his famous poem (Ghazal 143), he describes how he looks into a mysterious chalice to understand the keys to the world and existence. (In those days, a chalice symbolized heavenly knowledge.) Hafez was looking for the hidden secrets of existence. He wanted more than knowledge; he wanted to understand the connections or the meaning behind knowledge. What is the meaning of life? Or how does my life fit into the big picture of existence? Or, asked in another way: "What am I in the sight of God?" The Proverbs of Solomon has a similar motivation to Hafez. Solomon is also searching for the connections of existence.

I think it can be an important exercise to feel out the background of existence because ever since the age of rationalism, we have learned a completely different approach that doesn't ask about the circumstances but relies solely on perceived facts. I'll give you an example: in the time of Napoleon, scientists printed a thick book in which all scientific findings that had been valid to that point were written down. The scientists ceremoniously handed this book to Napoleon and asserted: "As of now, we no longer need faith in God to explain the world because science has completely demystified the secrets of the world!" Since then, the so-called scientific book of Napoleon itself has been debunked. Today, there is an approach in some places that proposes the exact opposite of Napoleon's science, namely that you can no longer trust any truth and that everything is relative. There is talk of a "post-factual age" in which it is not the facts themselves that are important, but rather their subjective impact or the understanding of their impact. The consequences are disastrous. If people can no longer trust facts, we are at the mercy of every lie and every deception. And it's a paradox that despite the explosion of scientific knowledge and despite the explosion of information dissemination, people don't know what is true and what is untrue. There is even the worry that those who have the most power have a monopoly of the truth. What then remains is that people see themselves as mere cogs in a biological or materialistic construct.

Considered from this perspective, you can claim biology for yourself, use it, change it, or even exploit it, depending on how you like it. But King Solomon has a completely different approach when he explains our existence. He describes our existence in this big world as us not acting without limits according to our own whims but having a personal counterpart. The truth is not knowledge that people can decipher, but on the contrary, it is wisdom that explains us, because Solomon speaks of wisdom as a person who claims us. For King Solomon, this is not the sum of knowledge that we can gather, but in fact a person who calls us, who challenges us, and who invites us to partake in Him. We immediately notice that there is more here than just higher knowledge or science. What wisdom offers us is not just more and more knowledge, but it offers us

orientation. I think that in our day and age, we have an abundance of knowledge and a corresponding lack of orientation. You could even say that with progressing knowledge, there is less orientation present. That doesn't mean that we can or should completely despise science. In some ways, knowledge can explain the background stuff to us and, as a gift of God, is an important part of our lives. I want to explain this with an example: when the pandemic brought the whole world into chaos, the scientific findings were good and correct, even if these findings were unclear, especially at the beginning, so that we could understand how the virus works and that precautions could be taken. The same findings could give us knowledge, but they couldn't give us orientation. Another example, if I google this question: "What is the path to life?" the internet produces a general summary of all the philosophical, religious, psychological, social, and biological knowledge about how to understand life and how to attain so-called life, depending on the respective viewpoint, based on all the knowledge that has been uploaded there. What the internet therefore offers us is an abundance of information but in no way any orientation. Wisdom that comes from God distinguishes itself by the fact that it not only imparts general information, but also orientation that is customized to the respective person. And so Solomon summarizes: "For whoever finds Me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find Me injures himself; all who hate Me love death."

This same wisdom that King Solomon describes for us is a wisdom that people cannot explain nor can books summarize it. Solomon even describes wisdom as being uninhibited and playing like a little child before God. It is a picture of harmony between God, nature, and people. It is a picture in which all questions stop and in which it is immediately clear where the differences lie between truth and untruth and between life and death. The harmony that comes about is so obvious that no one would think of questioning it. However, we now know that this harmony between God and the world is not without tension. This carefree approach to nature, to ourselves, and to God seems to belong to the past. Instead, more critical, disappointed, or even bitter voices come that ask things like: "If God is good, why does He allow evil in the world?" The interesting thing is that the wisdom that Solomon talks about is, in other places, a synonym for the Law. And to this day, the Jews believe that when the Law is perfectly fulfilled, the time of salvation or the Messianic age will begin. Then we would again live in harmony with nature. Wisdom and Law also seem to be one and the same for Solomon. Every child can certainly learn from the 10 Commandments that if everyone kept these commandments, there would be a perfect world. Then there would be no need for borders, prisons, weapons, or complicated bureaucracy to prevent corruption and theft. We would have the exact harmony of which Solomon speaks.

At the beginning, I quoted the Persian poet, Hafez, who saw the wisdom of God in his chalice. What is amazing is the end of his poem. There he even sees Christ at the end of his poem and says: "The grace of the Holy Spirit is to do to others what Christ has done." The New Testament sees the fulfillment of all wisdom and all laws in this Jesus Christ. Jesus says: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." We are amazed by Jesus and His empty tomb because the same power that created the world, raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is also the physical fulfillment of God's perfect will. In Him, we see how God wanted us to be and how He still wants us to be today. It is this Jesus who still works in us today through the power of His Spirit and is there for others. We can marvel at this and gain confidence. We sing a song that came from a dark past, it is a song of creation and the song is amazingly simple to sing. It speaks of a child who plays before God and playfully but naturally, holds all of creation in its hand. A child who effortlessly and naturally sees and understands the resurrection of Jesus in the same power of the Creator and the child stands there and invites us to see everything just as he does – our life, whether young or old, sick or healthy, disappointed or happy. *For whoever finds Me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. Amen.*