

I love that Wisdom in the Bible is personified as a woman. This accords with real life, lived experience. We all know dads are great for a lot of things, but it's really mom who *knows*. More often than not it's moms who are running the show, whether from out front or from behind. The whole operation, most of the time, holds together because of mom. Now I don't want to give dads and guys short shrift here. I certainly have occasional bouts of insight from time to time. It's just that my wife tends to have *more*. Of course, under no circumstances will I ever let on or admit that she's actually right. ;) Instead, I've developed a little work around. Inevitably whenever Dawn discovers a good way to do things, or a better way to do things, it goes in one ear and out the other. Naturally, I already know all the best ways to do things, so why would I need to listen to another way? Which is fine until its not. Then, when I realize I'm in a bind, I find a fresh occasion to present my wife's wisdom as if it were mine own genius insight and with all sincerity insist she follow it to the letter! This of course results in her laughing. In my face. But we actually

end up having a great laugh together, and her wisdom is affirmed, and the new practice is adopted by all. Win, win, win.

If only deeper wisdom in the world could be so easily attained.

There's a story about a proud young man who came to Socrates asking for knowledge. He walked up to the giant of a philosopher and said, "O great Socrates, I come to you for knowledge." Socrates recognized exactly what the young man needed. So he led the man through the streets, down to the sea, and chest deep into water. Then he asked, "What do you want?"

"Knowledge, O wise Socrates," said the young man with a smile. Socrates put his eagle talon hands on the man's shoulders and pushed him under.

Thirty seconds later Socrates let him up. "What do you want?" he asked again. "Wisdom, O great and wise Socrates" the young man

sputtered. Socrates shoved him under again. Thirty seconds passed, then thirty-five. Then forty. Socrates let him up. The man was gasping. "What do you want, young man?" Between heavy, heaving breaths the guy

wheezed out one more time, “Knowledge, O wise and wonderful...” Socrates plunged him under again. Forty seconds passed. Then fifty. “What do you want?” “Air!” the young man screeched. “I need air!”

The quantity of wisdom literature being sold at Amazon.com or at the local bookstore, or even at Costco is staggering. I’m continually blown away the endless supply of Tony Robbins books and DVDs still out there, the Netflix documentary specials, and the insatiable appetite for diet books that promise a svelte body and a deep connection to the wisdom of Mother Earth. Wisdom is presented everywhere as a secret to be unlocked and no shortage of suppliers are lined up to sell the three keys to success, the DVD package, or the “system” that unlocks it all. Socrates was one more source for the young man who sought him out. The old philosopher represented a quick fix, a treasure box, a vault to be cracked open and raided, and the philosopher could spot it from a mile away. What the young man wanted was neither wisdom, nor knowledge. In fact, there’s a

pretty good chance he was trying to avoid both. But the old philosopher, like a good mother, pushed him to the point of really telling the truth. And finally he did. And in the process put the first foot down on the path toward wisdom that was laying at his feet the whole time.

This story is most definitely apocryphal, but it beautifully points to what the Bible lifts up in its Wisdom literature and throughout: That wisdom is elemental, basic and found in simple things. Even air. Or a table set for a meal. Or simple hospitality. (Or a piece of cardboard or foam insulation shaped like a rocket!) It knows the elemental realities that sustain life, like eating and breathing and loving and forgiving, are where we most often meet God. Not on a three keys to eternal life conference, but in the person sitting beside us.

I'm amazed at how many monks and nuns who are masters of silent, contemplative prayer practices are also deeply wise people. While others are chasing after answers and fixes they are following their breath. In and

out, in and out, of their chest. The awareness of their simple breath leads to an awareness of air itself, and of God who created it and sustains life.

The Book of Proverbs starts by saying, “Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.” With awareness that God who created the world and all that is in it *is God*. Sometimes I wish wisdom could be attained by technique, learned from a book (maybe even a book named Proverbs!), but wisdom first comes with an invitation to a dance with the Holy Spirit, or to a feast with Lady Wisdom.

It’s often said that Wisdom is God’s consort. God’s partner. God’s spouse. This accords with personal experience. And also because God is relational and few things are ever known or grasped outside of relationship. Early in Israel’s history the guiding theology, or way of understanding of God, was what scholars called Deuteronmic. God was active in the world and ready to enforce the law, the basic and binding moral code. God rewarded the good and faithful, and punished the wicked. Wisdom meant following the

rules. With the Exile of Israel to Babylon this way of thinking about God shifted to some degree. An apocalyptic theology or way of thinking came into play. One that still saw the world as orderly and predictable, but it's now turned upside down. The righteous suffer sometimes, and wicked the wicked prosper sometimes. But there would come a time when God would set things right. The choices were to either oppose the wicked at great risk, join them, or maintain your identity in God. Wisdom guided the first and the third ways.<sup>1</sup> Wisdom meant more than just following the rules, but discerning a way forward in the midst of much ambiguity. It meant being invited into a dance with God, to a sumptuous feast with God, a table set with the very Bread of Life, living bread. Being strengthened for the journey and being changed all along the way. There's movement to this thing.

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has picked up on this. He's been intentional about calling us the "Episcopal branch of the Jesus *Movement*." And recently he's proposed some dance steps. They aren't "keys," but

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas S. Steagald. *Feasting on the Word, Year B Vol. 3* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox. 2009), 340

dance steps. Ways to be in relationship. He suggests seven moves... Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest. As we dance with the Lord we open ourselves up to Wisdom herself, and move two step forward and one back into earth-shaking, transformative LOVE.