



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 15, 2025
PROVERBS 8:1-4, 22-31; PSALM 8; ROMANS 5:1-5; JOHN 16:12-15

STAYING AFLOAT

John 16:12-15 [Jesus said to the disciples, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”]

What do we do when we can't stand on our own? These days, it feels like the water is rising faster than we can keep up. People of faith often look to Scripture for solid ground, but at first glance, what I see today on Trinity Sunday is a sea of abstraction. With stories, we can sometimes find a foothold. With today's readings, we have to work harder to touch ground. At least I do. Sure, it's fascinating to think about a feminine presence at the

dawn of time – Wisdom as a “she” in the typically all-male cast of creation – as a master worker rejoicing in the world. But that's reaching pretty far back to find a cause for hope today. What about here and now? St. Paul speaks in the present tense in Romans – but in such a seemingly easy way about suffering that it's hard to know what he's talking about. And then Jesus, in John's Gospel anyway, I love him – but he can bury the lead so

thoroughly – we can barely glimpse the Spirit of truth amidst the swirling repetition. What hope can we hold onto here? What can help us stay afloat?

Let's start with wisdom, that is, knowledge translated into action. Wisdom is less about mastering floods of information; it's more about riding the waves so they don't drown us. Wisdom is like the river guide in a whitewater raft – the one who knows the flow well enough to keep us in it and not sidelined in the shallows, who can tell us when we need to rest and when it's time to paddle hard. Wisdom helps us to set direction and move together to reach the shore.

But it's not all about knowing the terrain in advance. Wisdom also helps with what we can't predict or plan for. We can't measure it by our ability to write a paper or take a test; it has more to do with what we know from our elders, from our own experience, from those whose experience is radically different from ours – and how that comes out in the work of our hands, in how we treat each other, in

our capacity to respond with steadiness when reactivity and blame are so much easier.

According to Proverbs, wisdom calls out to us – not just on the heights, but at the crossroads. In other words, wisdom isn't found just on mountaintops or monasteries; she lives where we do. Wisdom is not the property of any one nation or religion or century. She doesn't reside within these walls alone; she's not found within Scripture alone. She speaks in the voices of people who've never heard or don't use church talk. It's not that wisdom isn't speaking now; it's that so many other voices are speaking too – more loudly and, apparently, more persuasively.

Where, then, does our reading from Romans fit into all this, with its unashamed God talk? Paul's wisdom here doesn't replace that of Proverbs so much as it enters farther downstream. In Paul's view, the experience of the risen Christ in our lives changes everything. The flow of the river will never be the same, so he needs new words to articulate that.

When we let this view shape ours, we start to make sense of his words. Of course, suffering isn't always a means to a good and worthy end. Suffering does not automatically produce endurance, much less character or hope; but we do have a better shot at learning and growing through our pain when we're surrounded by others who are committed to Jesus' radical love. Over time, as we practice this Jesus-shaped life in community, as we stand in solidarity with the scapegoated and tie our futures to theirs, as we find the new life that only emerges after death – these experiences gradually deepen and strengthen our character and our hope. They help us know what to hold onto when there is no solid place to stand and who to listen for as a guide.

We're told in today's Gospel that the Spirit will guide us into all the truth, and I for one find that reassuring. It means that we don't have all the truth now, and that's OK. We can't base every decision on today's horizon; there is still reason for hope beyond the would-be kings of today. It also

means that there will still be things we can't predict or plan for in the future; that's not a failure on our part. It's just how it is. We don't have to be knocked out by that. Finally, it means that we're not left to navigate the waters on our own. In the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of truth – we have a guide, someone who knows what to look for next – who can help us when the path we were on is blocked, who can show us our choices when there is no one right way to go, and who can hold onto us when we're knocked out of the raft altogether.

I'm no expert on whitewater rafting, but I do know that when we find ourselves out of the raft and in the rapids, the last thing we should do is force ourselves to stand alone. Sometimes our best option is to stop thrashing, ask for help, and let ourselves float – until we're either hauled back in or someone who sees more than we do can point out a resting place. I don't know where you are in this image – if you're not in the water, maybe your work today is

pulling people out of the river or it's stopping them from being tossed in; maybe you need to rest right now, or perhaps your job come Monday is to dig in and paddle hard. I suspect it's

all of the above. What I do know is that we'll go farther and faster when we listen for wisdom and move together. We were never meant to stand alone. Amen.



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