

“Listening the World Into Being”

Rev. David Gregory

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Pentecost 17

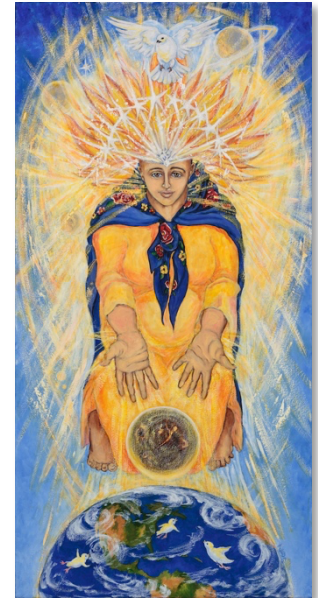
Readings

Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-30

from the New Revised Standard Version

Wisdom is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness.

Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;
for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.
She is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.



Wisdom Sophia
Marilyn Wells

From Mark Nepo in his book, *Drinking from the River of Light*

Day by day, we’re called to listen to life through the instrument of our own life. This requires an ability to follow the scent of life-force wherever it goes rather than trying to direct or bend life-force To know our voice, we need to let life move through us and honestly express what that movement makes us think and feel. Then, we have a chance to sing the world into being, one utterance at a time, not by preaching or persuading, but by listening to life and each other, the way a flag listens to the wind.

Lately, we’ve been talking a lot about the “broader view” of things, about getting ourselves high enough above the fray that we can see things from a larger perspective. This is an essential exercise right now, because unless we can develop the muscles of wisdom, it is rather impossible to navigate the world as we know it to be. Yesterday, of course, was a day of remembrance across our nation and throughout the world, as a twenty-year milestone was reached since the 9/11 attacks. In our household, we did not find

ourselves watching any television or following any of yesterday's observances like others might have. It's not that we don't care, or that we don't remember what happened that day, or that we do not honor the nearly 3,000 people who lost their lives that day, or all of those who perished in the two decades of war that came in its wake.

Our roots go pretty deep in New York. Twenty years ago I was living in Rochester, but had traveled to Manhattan for the Labor Day weekend and a few extra days of vacation with my partner at the time, along with my sister Anne, and several of our friends. On an excursion one day, some of us decided to visit the top of the Empire State Building — something I had never done. Others in our group went to the top of the World Trade Center. Just for kicks, I snapped photos of the World Trade Center from the Empire State Building and those in the other group did the opposite. In those days my camera had film in it, and several weeks passed before the film was developed. In the meantime, the towers came down. My short-term memory of having taken those photos was somehow wiped out ... that is, until I got the pictures back and saw the towers standing in the bright sunlight, and our one-week proximity to that horror became traumatically real.

For Tripp, and all of those whose life and work centered on Broadway in those days, it was an unspeakable devastation. Many of our New York friends have been posting memories on Facebook, resurfacing the trauma through photos and memories. "Never forget," we are told, as if that were even possible. One post I saw from a friend of ours described his experience of the anniversary this way:

Uneasy. That's the only way to name this feeling that I have today. Every 9/11 brings the memories and the emotions of that day. We all have them, our stories. On this date every year I assess. I assess how I feel about it, how I feel about the time that has lapsed and all that has happened. I take my spiritual temperature. Today I find that I am uneasy. The last year and a half has felt like 9/11 every day, it sometimes seems. The loss of life every day. The fear of the unknown every day.

This assessment of spiritual temperature is something that I share, and it describes the feelings that came up for me yesterday, all day: a sense of unease. I could feel differently if the sense of compassion, the momentary evaporation of bickering and partisanship, and the automatic oneness we felt as human beings had continued. I would love to say that we rose from the ashes as a morally stronger nation, that we noticed the fragility of life and decided that it's just too short to waste being greedy or addicted to power. I'd love to say that we saw in the devastation an opportunity to do something different, something better to care for the vulnerable peoples of the world.

I'm not here today to get into a debate about the "what-ifs." That would be a meaningless exercise. We have current realities to deal with, such as the 656,000 of our fellow citizens who have died in the pandemic. Those kinds of numbers are just unfathomable in my mind, and they continue to grow every day. If we aren't careful, we can lose our way in this unease that we feel, not just on September 11, but every single day. We can easily find ourselves swallowed up in trauma, ingesting way too much information, sleepless with worries about what might or might not happen next. So, as spiritual beings inhabiting human bodies, we need to remember that there is more to it than this. There is something higher, deeper, broader — something more pervasive and powerful than the circumstances that

surround us. There are resources that exist not in some far-off heaven, but right here in the very center of our souls to help us not only survive, but to thrive. There is peace to experience, joy to express, and love to be given and received. Across human history there have been attacks and wars, diseases and pandemics, injustice and inhumanity expressed in every time and place. And in all these times there have also been great awakenings, evolutionary leaps, and magnificent discoveries. There are heroic stories of survival and progress that happen every day; we just don't always hear about them, and this is why we must tell them to each other and to the world, every time we have an opportunity.

Within this human experience there is a timeless sense of wisdom, which is not just a skill or an implement from our "tool-box" to help us get by when we're feeling anxious. Wisdom is the essence and spirit of life itself, the pool of shared human experience which not only teaches us the facts, but also inspires our practice. Within this panorama we read ancient words from an apocryphal book called the Wisdom of Solomon, part of the great tradition of wisdom literature sufficient to inspire us across thousands of years. "Wisdom," we are told, "is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God." This is another way of saying that there is something much larger than ourselves at work, this reflection of all that we call God at work in us and through us. This mirror reflects to us within our breathing, within our contemplation, enlightening us through the words of great wisdom teachers, including but not limited to Jesus, for example. What greater wisdom is there in the world than, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?" All of the world's great religious traditions express some form of this thing we call the Golden Rule, reminding us that this wisdom is not the sole province of any one of them. "Against this wisdom," says Solomon, "evil does not prevail." I need those words today in the same way I needed them twenty years ago.

Last evening, as we were walking our dog, we came across a small banner in front of a church in our neighborhood that said in rainbow colors, "Love always wins." As we passed the banner, I reached out to touch it and said out loud, "I'm trying to believe this. I want to believe this." When I read the Wisdom of Solomon, I can begin to believe it. I can begin to breathe more deeply. I can see something larger at work, and know within my bones that it is real. But how do we manifest this wisdom? How do we bring it down into our experience? How do we change the world? Contemporary poet and author Mark Nepo gives us a clue when he says that "we have a chance to sing the world into being, one utterance at a time, not by preaching or persuading, but by listening to life and each other, the way a flag listens to the wind."



Wisdom for us is not plugging in the right ideas or facts that will determine outcomes. Rather it is a basking in the reflected glow of light, or the feeling of standing on a hillside and feeling the hugs of the breezes that flow around us. Within the noise of our culture we're more tempted than not to raise our voice in argument before our opponent has an opportunity to feel heard. We often ask ourselves, "What is the very next loving thing that I should do?" Today we ask, "What is the next wise thing to be done?" Perhaps it is the closing of our mouths and the opening of our ears to listen to life and each other the way a flag listens to the wind. We're beginning to see a better way forward. Let's listen our way into a brand new world.