

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jun 1st 2013

The Wisdom of Becoming Human

“When I was young and innocent, I sought wisdom openly in my prayer.” (Sirach 51:13)

The book of Sirach sings the praise of wisdom. What is wisdom? It does not settle on us like dew.

We must seek it. The search means being instructed in righteous ways. Sirach is bursting with precepts and decrees: “My son, take care of your father when he is old,” “humble yourself the greater you are,” “rob not the poor man of his livelihood.” Those who live the ways of wisdom are promised delight. True wisdom does not leave us dour or vengeful.

The authorities were determined to trap the troublemaker. They had lost touch with the deeper wells of wisdom and were left grasping at power. With street smarts, Jesus deflected their questions, and they fell into the hole dug for him. His silence was not retreat. Wisdom does not remain on the sidelines far from the fray. Jesus responds to the others’ crooked hearts, not their words.

Some say wisdom is measured by actions: if I show mercy, my ideas do not matter. We can disagree about what is real and true but together serve the poor. Anyway, isn’t one idea just as good as another? Isn’t theory just another name for “whatever”? But God did not say to love thy neighbor and quit thinking. Thinking isn’t a temptation to resist; it’s one way we become free. Wisdom calls us to do what is right and make sense of the world.

One task of wisdom is to sound out the imposters. There are a pack of jazzy sounding ideas prowling around this time in history. For example, if one opinion is as good as another, why work for justice?

If concepts are formed by humans, all we ever know is our own reflection. If goodness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, what happens to the goodness deep down in things that we didn’t put there?

If ultimate reality means particles colliding in space, what happens to the self who studies those particles and tries to make sense of her hopes and dreams?

Being a seeker is not good enough. If truth is deemed beyond human reach, why bother to search?

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