

"Speech, Language and Wisdom" by Margreta Silverstone

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Prelude – Dolly Parton's "Shine"

Offertory-Phil Collins' "Another Day in Paradise"

Good morning. This is my first time standing solo behind this lectern. I stood here a bit ago as part of a mission group sermon. I haven't been able to find a voice to speak from this place in the past few years. In part that had to do with my own journey of life. In part it had to do with my own uncertainty of my place within Seekers.

Speech and Language

As you know, life made a significant change for Jeffrey and me in the past year. I experience the wonder of raising a son. While we have our moments of dealing with a 20-month-old's temper tantrums and thrown items, there are times where we can find humor in the tough times and joy in the good times. This past week, Oslin said "one foot" and last week he said both "leche" and "gato" on the same day. We also deal with "no" as one of his favorite words.

An amazing thing is going on for Oslin. In two languages, he is putting together sounds and experiences to come up with speech and language. According to one of our parenting sources, Oslin is gaining nine words a day right now. We aren't getting the privilege of hearing them yet, but he is gaining an understanding of the symbolic importance of language and these words will come out some day, soon enough. Putting all these pieces together is tough for him. And, some of his frustrations may become less when he gains ways to tell us what is wrong. In the meantime, he knows that he can throw a tantrum and we know something is wrong. Not that we always pay attention to those tantrums in any way that makes him feel better.

Oslin also doesn't always have command of his speech enough to say the words he knows. This has been problematic sometimes as he may say a part of the word, but not all of it and people come up with their own conclusions about what word he meant. I had that happen with his trying to say "shoes" and it sounded more like "shit". My understanding is that this issue of speech is something that he will work on until he goes to school. The ability to learn how to speak is difficult. And, we are encouraging Oslin to learn speech in two languages, ones that don't always use the same parts of the mouth to form speech.

And so, we stand in amazement at Oslin's speech, like the author of James too. Good and bad can come out of his mouth. He can have screaming tantrums and sweetly say "gracias" the next. So much of both good and bad can come out of one mouth, from one tongue.

We have been learning too that speech and language is not the

same thing. Oslin has no problem saying “no”. He has trouble comprehending when he really should be using “no”. Sometimes we try to help him understand the real question and let him live with the consequences of saying no; such as asking if he wants to come in from the car and letting him stay in the car seat when he says no. At other times, we phrase our questions so that they work when he answers “no”.

Wisdom Speaking

[The Hebrew Scriptures for this week](#) are of wisdom speaking out throughout the city. Wisdom speaks on the busy street and at the central square. Wisdom complains that the people haven't chosen to listen. Wisdom threatens to turn away if this pattern continues.

But, what is this wisdom? Or, what is wisdom in general?

The Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom>) defined wisdom as

The ability, developed through experience, insight and reflection, to discern truth and exercise good judgment. It is sometimes conceptualized as an especially well developed form of common sense. Most psychologists regard wisdom as distinct from the cognitive abilities measured by standardized intelligence tests. Wisdom is often considered to be a trait that can be developed by experience, but not taught. When applied to practical matters, the term wisdom is synonymous with prudence. Some see wisdom as a quality that even a child, otherwise immature, may possess independent of experience or

complete knowledge.

The status of wisdom or prudence as a virtue is recognized in cultural, philosophical and religious sources. Some define wisdom in a utilitarian sense, as foreseeing consequences and acting to maximize the long-term common good.

Earlier in this same chapter of Proverbs, prior to the reading, it states "Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." The "Fear of God" is also mentioned in the Psalms reading for today. In combination with the Wikipedia, my own definition of wisdom is "the ability, developed through experience, insight and reflection, to discern God's truth and follow God's direction".

It takes years to learn some basic speech patterns. It takes years to develop and understand language. And, I believe the same is needed for wisdom. Gaining wisdom takes years. It takes learning from experience. It takes learning from the insights we have made ourselves or that others have shared. It takes time to do the reflection necessary to have wisdom. Wisdom takes a level of language comprehension and integration that is as big as the gap between speech and language. Wisdom takes time.

I appreciate the Proverbs passage identifying that wisdom takes place in the busy places of our lives and within community settings. Wisdom isn't something that happens in the solitude of our home and quiet time. Wisdom happens in the dirty noisy centers of the city; on the metro; in the grocery store; at work; at school. Wisdom happens in the trenches; whether those are battle trenches or building trenches. Our wisdom experiences are more in the intersections of life than

in solitude. Our experiences **shared** can be sources for wisdom. I think [Marjory's sermon from two weeks ago](#) gives good examples of this.

But, I also find the Proverbs passage frightening. It seems that we can choose to ignore opportunities to gain wisdom. And, if we do that too often, wisdom will never come again.

I recognize wisdom is a learned trait. If I choose to habitually ignore opportunities for learning wisdom, I set a pattern for myself that becomes hard to break. I am not in the regular pattern of building my language skills. This same lack makes it more difficult to learn a second language as an adult.

Proverbs presents wisdom as though it was an independent entity. This is not the first time Wisdom is personified. It first occurs in Job. Nor is it the last time, it happens in the prophets. Who is wisdom personified is open to interpretation. Some think this independent entity is the Holy Spirit, some Logos, and some Christ. In any event, I resent the fact that wisdom can walk away, stop speaking, hold back information, refuse to answer, hide, and smirk at my failings. Wisdom appears fickle. If wisdom is personified, I want a more sympathetic teacher.

Teachers of Wisdom

Our model teacher in the scriptures is Jesus. He has been spending years with his disciples. Over the past three years,

he has let these people live with him, follow him everywhere, tell them what he has been thinking, let them see him in action with others. Through stories, questions to reflect upon, insights into his thinking, and exposure to experiences, Jesus is trying to give wisdom to the disciples.

Since Jesus' view of the world and the kingdom of God and way to live in the world was so different from their upbringing, I am sure that these adult learners weren't always easy to handle. The disciples had to break old habits to be open to learning. They had to gain a new understanding of God.

In the scripture for today, Jesus asks his disciples who people have been saying he is. It's a relatively easy question, one that demonstrates if the disciples have been listening to the chatter around them. And their responses demonstrate that they have. The next question takes some reflection. Is it the personal answer to the question, "Who do **you** say that I am?" And, after three years of learning, Peter answers "You are the messiah." Now, understanding the word "messiah" and the definition being used in this context could be a sermon alone, which I am not preaching. While Peter gets credit for getting the answer right, the reprimand he gets later is in part a reflection of the struggle that is going on in giving this word a new meaning. The command Jesus gives to not tell others that he is the messiah is another hint.

If the wisdom teacher in Proverbs is fickle, Jesus is not. He continues to educate his disciples; set them straight and offer his teaching to a wider audience. We see throughout the gospel that Jesus manages to be patient with his students.

Of course, if I want a more sympathetic teacher, I may want to recall what it is like for him or her. Wisdom teachers get exasperated by their students. Wisdom teachers often are misunderstood. Wisdom teachers don't have an easy time living in society. Wisdom teachers need their down time and their own places to regain energy and wisdom. And wisdom teachers may be crucified. And that's just if the wisdom teacher is Jesus!

Seekers Seeking Wisdom

Seekers Church believes there are prophetic voices speaking all the time. The challenge is for us to hear and learn and understand the prophetic voice. My challenge is to listen for the wisdom teachers speaking today.

In this season of recommitment, I have to make the choice again if I am to be intentional about my faith. I make the commitment to read Scripture, spend time in prayer and silence for discernment, and spend time in service. I commit to actions that will help me grow in my experience, insight and reflection. I commit to actions that will help me discern God's truth and follow God's direction. I commit to gaining wisdom.

I still have the opportunity to listen to the wisdom of Jesus as found in the Scriptures. In this week's lesson, Jesus asked the extended crowd if they wanted to gain wisdom too. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Crosses aren't fun. Crosses are work. Jesus reminds me seeking wisdom isn't easy and can be painful. Jesus reminds me following is something for the long haul and is about commitment.

As I choose to commit to this within the context of Seekers Church, there is a corporate component or opportunity. In our gatherings of Seekers, there is always the opportunity for the gathering to be about gaining wisdom. When I come to a Seekers event, I may gain wisdom. At our Sunday worship, sometimes I gain wisdom from the preacher. Sometimes, I gain wisdom from the prayers. Sometimes, I gain wisdom from the reflection time after the sermon. Sometimes, I gain wisdom from the songs. In the [School of Christian Living](#), sometimes I gain wisdom from the teacher of the class, from the fellow students, from the dinner meditation, from the reading, and from the homework writing exercise. In mission group, sometimes I gain wisdom from the conversation around our mission and call. And, sometimes, I'm too tired and saturated with my own thoughts to gain any wisdom at any of these events. And, as I am reminded by the image of the cross, being at the Sunday worship, the mission group and the classes isn't always about me. It is about picking up my cross and being at the places where I need to be.

Just as there are different ways to pastor, I think there are many different wisdom teachers here in Seekers. Who is your wisdom teacher? Who I name as mine may be different than the person you name. My wisdom teachers are folks who are asking good questions. Questions like, "Is 'duty' a bad four letter word in Seekers? And, if so, why?" My wisdom teachers may be voracious readers who bring a story or insight that they have gained from their reading. My wisdom teachers have tried to live a life of service and shared their story; sharing successes and failures. Please take a moment to look around at those who are gathered here. Take a moment to remember those who have sat with us in this church. Who are your wisdom teachers?

Years ago, a storyteller told me about the "Vavnik". In some Jewish traditions, there is a story that the world is held together by a few righteous people. They do not know they are the Vavnik themselves. And, should a Vavnik die, God raises up another. You may be someone's wisdom teacher. I may be someone's wisdom teacher. Does this change anything in the way you live? Does this change anything in the way that I live? Does this change anything in the way that we relate to this church and our journeys of faith? Does this change our search for wisdom?