

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2016  
Trinity Sunday

## We can boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God. (Rms 5.2)

In our reading from Proverbs today, Wisdom stands at the city gates and demands attention. She, and in Hebrew the word used for Wisdom is female, is closely associated with God, so closely in fact that she is said to be created before creation itself and had a part to play in the creation of the universe. My first question today is, what or who is Wisdom and how does understanding Wisdom throw light on our understanding of the Trinitarian God?

So we start this morning's sermon with a little bible study. In this passage from the Book of Proverbs, the personification of Wisdom is a form of theological education, a root or form of learning, possibly linked, in style at least if not content, with the Egyptian texts used in the teaching of royal princes and state officials. It is quite possible Proverbs has a similar function with Wisdom as a method or theology of learning. Twice is Wisdom personified in the Book of Proverbs, here in chapter 8 and again in chapter 1 (1.21-31). This personification is a tool used to focus the attention of the student – it is not the teacher but the instruction itself that addresses the student. This is not such an unusual technique, but unusually in the text we have this morning Wisdom is given a close relationship with God, rather than a teacher figure. This changes the relationship of Wisdom with the reader, something we will come back to.

This passage from Proverbs is known as 'The hymn of self-praise' where Wisdom first announces her origins before creation and then her place in the scheme and very act of creation. Wisdom then is created by God (v.22) or if we take on the more royal overtones of 'set up' (v.23) she is enthroned by God, she then has a superior standing to creation, which follows in the second part of 'The hymn of praise'. Here Wisdom takes the title of 'master workman' with whom or through whom God creates the universe, brings creation into being. Here I think we as readers have to begin to grapple with a difficulty. Here is a theology, a way of thinking and studying, that now is more than just personified, it is given a function in the process of creation, we now have to imagine some kind of eternal nature of truths as part of the theology of Wisdom.

This passage, with its poetic imagery has proved critical in the development of Wisdom as a theological concept. It is first taken up in later Jewish texts such as The Book of Ecclesiasticus and The Wisdom of Solomon, books both found in our Apocryphal collection and both developing the concept of Wisdom in late Jewish theology, raising Wisdom to the status of a distinct person, subject to God. In turn this has led to further developments with Wisdom being identified with the Law, the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Eventually this developed idea of Wisdom came to form an important part in early Christian theology, especially in the development of the doctrine of the person of Christ. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1.24 for example, calls Jesus Christ 'Wisdom of God'.

The question of how Wisdom came into being, 'begotten' by God only adds to Early Christian thought and the suggestion of Christ's pre-existence along with his close relationship to the Father. This may have been something in the mind of the author of John's gospel as he wrote the prologue, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life." (Jn 1.1-4a) where Word in the Greek is 'logos' meaning knowledge or wisdom. In Christian understanding then we can see in this passage from Proverbs a way of understanding the place of Christ Jesus in relation to the Divine Father.

The passage from Paul's letter to the Romans we also read explores further this very important relationship between God and Christ Jesus. In this passage, unlike elsewhere, Paul feels able to boast. He is boasting in a relationship through which we, humble humanity, are forgiven and in being forgiven, receive the grace of God and so can share in God's glory. The relationship in which we boast is that between Christ Jesus and God who is now, because of the ministry of Jesus, called our Father. We know the truth of this boast through the Holy Spirit, through whom the love of God is poured into our hearts. This is all possible through the divine reconciliation pronounced in v.1.

We then have a Christ who is closely connected to God, who was before the world began and through whom creation came into being. It is through this same Jesus Christ that we may boast, not in ourselves, but in the reconciliation brought about by him in God, through whom God's grace is mediated and in whom we are forgiven, receiving the gift of God's love through the Holy Spirit.

It is this that Jesus speaks of in our Gospel passage today. Jesus has yet to be glorified, has yet to complete his mission of reconciliation and salvation. Yet here, Jesus creates a strong link between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – something that becomes clearer later in Christian teaching. Now Jesus makes a strong connection, through the Spirit to the disciples upon whom the charge of the Son will be placed. Jesus, the Wisdom figure in Christian theology, whose authority rests in the Father before the world began now commissions his disciples and draws them into relationship with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that calls them to share the same truth that Jesus has proclaimed; that is the grace of God that brings forgiveness to all, that reconciles humanity to the divine, that heals creation and draws all things back into relationship with God.

Here, in the nature of God who is proclaimed Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a new creation, a new relationship is offered to all who follow. That is one based on love offered in grace and made real for us in the broken bread and outpoured wine of the Eucharist. Here is found the source of that truth for us; we now are one with God as God is one with all creation. All things are healed and in Paul's words we too can boast in Christ Jesus for we are forgiven, reconciled to God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.