

SERMON AT BRUNSWICK: 5/1/2003: GEOFF CHADWICK: CHRISTMAS 2:

JN 1:1-18: “WORDS OF WISDOM”

There is an Old Testament tradition known as the “Wisdom Tradition”. This tradition is perhaps, a little unfamiliar to us because much of it is contained in the apocryphal books of the bible. These, books found between the Old and New Testaments have always been a part of our Anglican Tradition although reading from them on Sundays has usually been optional. Nevertheless, words of Wisdom are found in some of the biblical books we are more familiar with: Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. In these books, Wisdom is often portrayed as a woman who has great virtue and value:

“1 Wisdom praises herself,
And tells of her glory in the midst of her people.
2 In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth,
And in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory:
3 I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist.
4 I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.
5 Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss.
6 Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway.
7 Among all these I sought a resting place; in whose territory should I abide?
8 Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent.
He said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob,
and in Israel receive your inheritance.’ (Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 24:1-8, NRSV).

This “Wisdom Tradition” was well known at the time of Jesus and at the time of the early church. Wisdom was seen to be the great virtue emanating from God and filling the created order with its goodness.

This theme thus gets picked up by John when he records the famous hymn-like words at the beginning of his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was With God, and the Word Was God. 2He was in the beginning with God; 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has

come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
5The light Shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...:
14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his
glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:1-14,
NRSV)

The early church would have understood Jn's intention here: to identify Jesus (the Word) with Wisdom. To point out that the great and good virtue of God permeating all things is to be found in a specific way in Jesus. Jn is saying to his hearers: "You've heard of wisdom; now see it!. No longer is Wisdom simply a noble idea - it is to be found in the life and work of a particular person. This person is Jesus and you are about to hear his story. Jesus and Wisdom go hand in hand!"

But what of this wisdom? How might we know it? How might we describe it?

Based on Isaiah Ch 11 our prayerbook puts it like this in the confirmation service:

"Strengthen [these people], we pray, with the Holy Spirit
that they may grow in grace.
Increase in them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of discernment and inner strength, the spirit of knowledge and
true godliness, and fill them with wonder and awe at your presence..."
(APBA, 1995, p90).

Wisdom is to be found in these qualities:

Understanding

Discernment

Inner Strength

Knowledge

True godliness

The ability to wonder.

If this is the case then I think we should seek these qualities within ourselves. We seek divine wisdom – the kind that Jesus had. We seek divine wisdom – the kind that leaps forth from the mouth of God. We seek divine wisdom that it might have its resting place in us.

Wisdom; that we might truly understand the perplexing world around us.

Wisdom; that we might tell the difference between what is good and what is evil; what is honourable and what is dross.

Wisdom; that we might know that inner strength that comes from God.

Wisdom; that knows the difference between the things of God and what we think are the things from God.

Wisdom; that we might wonder and stand in awe at God's presence.

John, in the first chapter of his Gospel makes it clear that Jesus is God's Word of wisdom. Let us dwell on this word that we might be God's words of wisdom in a world gone mad.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.