

Sunday Service
Avoch linked with Fortrose-Rosemarkie
16th Sunday after Pentecost
Wisdom for Living: Proverbs 1-9
Proverbs 1: 20-33 / James 3:13-16
“Wisdom calls aloud in the public square – are her words a challenge or rebuke?”

Call to Worship

Praise the LORD. Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands.

Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered for ever. © NIV

1 - CH4 122 Let all the world in every corner sing (Luckington)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfXldoDnvq4>

(Follow the lyrics on the screen)

Prayers of Approach/ Confession/ Lord's Prayer

Almighty God, Creator, and Ruler of all,
we come this day to worship You
and to ask Your guidance upon our lives.
We come to be still,
we come to listen,
and we come to offer ourselves to You.
Prepare our hearts to receive Your word
and up lift our spirits as we spend time together worshipping You,
so that when we leave this place of worship
we may feel renewed and refreshed.

CONFESSION (we come to a time of confession)

Lord God we bring our brokenness, our fears and concerns,
our sinfulness, and we lay them at your feet, seeking your forgiveness.

SILENCE (as we confess our sins)

ABSOLUTION

In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name, AMEN.

Lord God, defend your Church from all false teaching
and give to your people knowledge of your truth,
that we may enjoy eternal life

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. AMEN

2 – CH4 625 O thou who camest from above (Hereford)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3UYybc7Xa0>

(Follow the lyrics on the screen you may need to copy and paste the link)

Word of God

Bible Reading 1 – James 3:13-16

James 3:13-16

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you?

*Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done
in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

*¹⁴ But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts,
do not boast about it or deny the truth.*

*¹⁵ Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual,
demonic.*

*¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every
evil practice.*

3 – CH4 509 Jesus calls us o'e the tumult (St Andrew)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pP5yMVjRy8I>

(Follow lyrics on the screen)

Word of God

Bible Reading 2 – Proverbs 1:20-33

²⁰ Out in the open wisdom calls aloud,
she raises her voice in the public square;

²¹ on top of the wall^[a] she cries out,
at the city gate she makes her speech:

²² 'How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?
How long will mockers delight in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?

²³ Repent at my rebuke!
Then I will pour out my thoughts to you,
I will make known to you my teachings.

²⁴ But since you refuse to listen when I call
and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,

²⁵ since you disregard all my advice
and do not accept my rebuke,

²⁶ I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you;
I will mock when calamity overtakes you –

²⁷ when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

²⁸ 'Then they will call to me but I will not answer;
they will look for me but will not find me,

²⁹ since they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the LORD.

³⁰ Since they would not accept my advice
and spurned my rebuke,

³¹ they will eat the fruit of their ways

and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.
³² For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
³³ but whoever listens to me will live in safety
and be at ease, without fear of harm.'

**Sermon: “Wisdom calls aloud in the public square –
are her words a challenge or rebuke?”**

This week’s reading points us in two directions. First to the figure of wisdom – “Lady Wisdom” as she has been called and we will reflect on this person and her role in the book and in the lives of the faith community. Secondly, Lady Wisdom goes out into the public square and inasmuch as we join her there we are reminded that biblical wisdom is not just for “the prayer closet” – it’s for the world in which we live – public and private. Thinking of that and the theme “Wisdom calls aloud in the public square” That pushes us to ask the question of ourselves – “are her words a challenge or rebuke?”

Lady Wisdom in the public square

²⁰ *Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;*

²¹ *on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech:*

Proverbs has a number of female roles and protagonists. Mothers (as well as fathers) play a role as teachers (1:8 and 6:20); and 31:1-9 includes the queen who teaches her son as well as the capable wife of 31:10—31.

Not to mention what we could term the “alluring woman” figure of the opening chapters (very much a recurring figure and a reminder in the days before the internet that sexuality and prudence are not new issues ... And finally, there is “Madam Folly” (see chapter 9:13-18) – a vivid personification of the alternative to “Lady Wisdom’s” platform and stance.

As Lucas puts it: “Wisdom ... appears personified as a woman in Prov 1:20-33 She is depicted as crying out in the public places of the city, addressing the “simple ones.” In a first-person speech she warns of disaster for those who have not paid any heed to her words, and promises security to those who pay heed.”

We’ll keep returning to the public context as we go along– but let’s begin with the message of “wisdom” and its delivery.

Lady Wisdom raises her voice and cries out

The way wisdom speaks reminds us of the seriousness of wisdom’s address - *she raises her voice*

she cries out. Note that part of the forcefulness is the public setting where wisdom needs to be heard - in “public places or public squares, the top of the wall and the city gates.” Wisdom wants to be heard she wants to make her speech. There is a tone of urgency!

²² *‘How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?*

How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?

The urgency comes because the mockers (aka the simple and the fools – the sense is the morally and ethically foolish ...) don't pay attention. They don't respond. If we think of the pitfalls of adolescence we know how hard it is to change habits once they're formed – the spell of addiction, of unhealthy relationships, the “gang” - in its community sense of disaffected teens; or even something much darker that lies behind the violence and knife crime of our societies. Often the path to life can be strayed from and even lost in the late teens. Against all these pressures, the voice of wisdom persists: from challenge it turns to rebuke.

Lady Wisdom loses patience – challenge turns to rebuke

²³ *Repent at my rebuke!*

Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

This is why it shifts to a note of rebuke. So you don't want to pay attention – you refuse to listen.

²⁴ *But since you refuse to listen when I call*

and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,

²⁵ *since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke,*

²⁶ *I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you –*

²⁷ *when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,*

when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

Even Lady Wisdom has limits to her patience: “I will laugh is not an expression of personal heartlessness, but of the absurdity of choosing folly, the complete, vindication of wisdom and the incontestable fitness of the disaster.”

²⁸ *'Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me,*

²⁹ *since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD.*

This leads to a crunch moment! Those who rejected wisdom - will call to me but I will not answer;

they will look for me but will not find me. The grounds for their rejection was to hate knowledge and not choose to fear the Lord – not recognise God – as we said last week – they did not have the sense of God as God” of God as “Yahweh.”

³⁰ *Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke,*

³¹ *they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.*

Wisdom calls aloud in the public square

Thinking of this idea of the public places or the public square, there is a contrast with the homeliness or domestic, family setting of verses 8 and 9 of the parents instructing young people in the ways of life – within the home. Here, wisdom is seen to be of relevance for life in all its hustle and bustle. Atkinson makes the point that this picture “is far more ordinary than Speakers’ Corner. In Old Testament social life we often find that the gateways of the city (1:21) are the places where the elders of the city gather to make plans, to enact justice and to deliberate together about the welfare of the city.” He points to the example of Boaz (in Ruth) and the rebukes of Amos to the leaders of Israel.

This idea that wisdom needs to be in the ordinary places of life is important. Kidner also captures the balance well between reflection and doing – “... the offer of wisdom is to the person in the street, and for the business of living, not to an elite for the pursuit of scholarship.” Modern Christians use a variety of terms to capture this outward side of Christian life. LICC use words like “whole-life” worship and “whole-life disciples.”

The words of a song we’ll hear shortly and then sing capture this well:

Before all things in him all things were made
Inspiring culture media and trade
May all our work serve your economy

Transform revive and heal society
Peace truth and justice reigning everywhere
With us be present in our public square
Fill all who lead with your integrity
Transform revive and heal society

The Marketplace

One of the Lausanne Movement reflections on Evangelism in the modern world, looks at Christianity and culture in terms of how the arts can connect to this and talks of “the marketplace.” That is, the importance of challenging ideas in the hustle and bustle of trade. All these phrases – the public square, the marketplace, whole-life discipleship – are making connections between our faith and the world around us – they challenge us to connect wisdom and faith to our inner and our outer lives. The picture of Lady Wisdom calling aloud in the streets does the same. That’s the idea of challenge. The dimension of rebuke is the flip side of that.

³² *For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;*

³³ *but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.’*

If we fail to heed the words of wisdom, then there are serious outcomes: the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. If we ask the question what are the issues that adversely affect young people in western Europe, the answers are quite troubling – suicide (multiple factors); drug deaths (hopelessness and social disintegration - exploited but not always addressed); self-harm (low self-esteem et al); severe eating disorders (self-image and wider issues) - we will see that many challenges remain even in our own society with its advantages of universal education and health provision.

Christianity has a voice to share in our society – a society that has issues with resilience, a society that values free expression and individualism sometimes over the respect of community and more disciplined patterns of living, and a society where even education can be hampered by poor discipline especially when compared with *other* societies (as noted by a recent OECD report comparing western and Asian attainments.)

No wonder that as Atkinson puts it:

“Wisdom offers her advice in the public place. This is no secret knowledge, no private religious opinion. Wisdom can be found, and her advice heard, in the public

realm. Where people live their lives, build their relationships, learn their skills, seek their health and defend against death, there God's wisdom can be heard.

Wisdom calls aloud in the public square – are her words a challenge or a rebuke?"

4 – CH4 708 O Lord the clouds are gathering (A Never-Failing Stream)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xfv9OI59_7o

(Follow lyrics on the screen)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and for Others and Ourselves

Our loving and Heavenly Father, you have given us everything we have and all that we need.

We thank you for your word in the Bible, and we worship and adore the Christ whom we see in its pages.

We thank you for your faithfulness and your long-suffering patience with us.

We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, but most of all, dear Father, we thank you for your greatest gift, your son who is our Saviour, guide, and friend for ever – and to him be all the glory.

Gracious God

We pray for justice in the world

We pray for Brazil and its leadership and especially the tensions between the government and the President.

We pray too for Burma / Myanmar in the painful struggles of a military takeover in recent months

We pray for those who knowingly flout Your will and exploit others for their own gain.

We pray for those who challenge organised crime and its devastating impact on lives and economies.

We pray for our country as political leaders have been sharing their vision for the coming year – especially around economics and health and social care.

We pray for those who put their trust and faith in false gods, who know there is something missing in their lives but deny that it is You – instead seeking refuge in money, possessions, and success.

We pray for those who reach out to cities and communities in Europe from the Church of Scotland – we pray for the church in Rotterdam and the multi-ethnic community that attends church there.

We pray for our own community as the number of Covid cases has risen dramatically.

We pray for the teachers and student in our schools, may they receive strength to deal with the impact the pandemic has caused and is continuing to cause to our education system.

We pray for our local congregations that they will retain a positive and hopeful outlook in this time of uncertainty and significant change.

We pray for our community where there is brokenness and pain.

For those who are in sorrow and need. For the hungry, poor, and lonely.

For the sick and bereaved.

Be their rock and constant companion through difficult and dark days.

Draw near to all and grant the peace of Your presence,

the healing of Your touch and Your guidance and assurance of love

so that all who are weak and weary may walk in hope and faith.

These things we ask in Jesus named AMEN

5 – LICC We seek your kingdom (Eventide)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Lp2mMpSa1E>

(Listen to the lyric in the video clip, you may need to copy and paste this link)

Sending

Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

Surely the righteous will never be shaken;
they will be remembered for ever.

They will have no fear of bad news;
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. © NIV

6 – CH4 803 We will walk with God (Sizohamba Naye)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKybxg99fUc>

(Listen to the lyric in the video clip you may need to copy and paste this link)

Benediction

The God who called us here
is now sending us out into the world
to put the words we have heard into action.

As we have worshipped together
now let us leave here renewed and refreshed
to share the good news with those we meet.

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and
Holy Spirit rest on us in our daily lives. AMEN.

We are using materials from Weekly Worship