

From a very young age, I have had a complicated relationship with the Bible. One of my earliest memories of engaging with scripture takes place when I was about 7 years old. I don't remember if it was a Sunday school class or Vacation Bible school or something else altogether. All I remember is standing up in front of about 20 other kids my age and a teacher sitting just behind my left shoulder. I was supposed to recite the verse of scripture that I had been given to memorize. As I stood there with my mouth getting dry and the eyes of all the other kids staring at me, I could not remember a single word. I knew that the memory verses were all posted on the wall to my left. Two really strong opposing forces began to battle in my soul almost like the cartoons you see with the devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other: The cartoon devil saying: "you don't want to disappoint your teacher do you? Just take a peek at the poster. Use your peripheral vision, no one will even notice. You don't want to look stupid do you?" The cartoon angel was not nearly as vocal. It seemed to speak in a whisper simply saying, "peeking is cheating and cheating is wrong." I must admit that my fear of looking stupid and my desire to be a good student won out. But it DID NOT go unnoticed. My sly attempt at using my peripheral vision completely failed and the kids started yelling "she's cheating!" I immediately regretted my decision and sat down feeling humiliated and ashamed.

This is my earliest memory of my relationship with Bible. We were not off to a great start. My experiences with the Bible did improve over time. When I started attending Trinity Bible Church as a teenager reading the Bible was central to that experience. I attended a new members class and we were required to read the book of Luke as we journeyed through the class. It was the first time I had read an entire book of the Bible and had someone help me understand what I was reading. It was also the first time I read a Bible that had footnotes and commentary which changed my entire experience of reading scripture.

But as I continued to read different parts of the Bible, and as I listened to the explanations from the Trinity Bible Church leadership, I struggled a lot with what I was hearing. I heard messages like "only people who believe in Jesus can get into heaven." I knew some really awesome people who didn't believe in Jesus and I couldn't imagine

the God I had been learning about punishing people because they weren't Christian. One of my youth group friends asked, "What if someone lives on an isolated island with no Bibles and no one has ever told them about Jesus?" We all looked at the leader with anticipation. The answer was "well they would develop a sense of awe and wonder as they looked at the world around them and they could choose to believe in God as the creator." "But I thought to myself "that's not the same as believing specifically in Jesus." That was when I began to wonder if this was the right church for me.

I disagreed with that church on a number of things including not allowing women to be pastors, but their interpretation of scripture bothered me quite a bit. There was no wondering about what something meant – there was one accepted way to understand a piece of scripture and that was that. When I returned to the United Church of Christ as an adult one of the first sermons I heard was a different way of interpreting the story of Adam and Eve. In that sermon, Eve (and therefore all women) was not the lesser human because she was created second as I had been told in my other church. The whole story was turned inside out and re-examined. I didn't realize it at the time, but that sermon was a perfect example of one of the UCC's slogans – "God is Still Speaking".

The phrase "God is Still Speaking" became part of the UCC identity since 2004 but this understanding of a God who continues to reveal new wisdom and truth has been part of our history back to the Pilgrims' voyage to America in 1620. As he bid them farewell and not knowing if they would ever see each other again, their pastor John Robinson delivered a sermon in which he said "If God should reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth of my ministry; for I am very confident the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy word." The Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy word. Another way of saying God is Still Speaking.

Our text from Proverbs this morning can serve a reminder to continue to seek Wisdom. Every society hands down its wisdom to the next generation. The book of Proverbs is a written collection of Israel's traditional wisdom that was gathered into one book approximately 2400 years ago. We are introduced to this book of wisdom by

meeting Wisdom personified. Wisdom is portrayed as a woman who was one of God's first creations. Created before God created the world, Wisdom took part in that creation. In the verses we heard this morning, Lady Wisdom has come to the marketplace and seems to be lamenting the resistance the people have to listening to her. She asks, "How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" Is there not anything more frustrating than someone who refuses to hear new information? I think about all the times my parents tried to share wisdom with me when I was a teenager only to be met with eye-rolling and audible sighs of displeasure. People say that teenagers think they know everything. The funny thing is, I don't think that's true. At least for me, I knew I didn't know everything. I just believed my parents didn't know anything more than I did. Wisdom could have been speaking to 15 year old me when she says "How long O simple ones, will you love being simple?"

This Wisdom, the Wisdom created by God and the Wisdom who was with God at the beginning of our creation, is pleading with us to pay attention, to listen. Wisdom cries out, "I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you." The question is, are we listening? Are we listening to all the different ways God's wisdom is poured out? Are we listening to the wisdom of our elders who not only remind us from where we have come, but add experience and perspective to the journey we are currently traveling? Are we listening to our contemporaries? Those with whom we share the same cultural memory, but who experienced similar events with a different lens than we did. Are we listening to the young ones? Those who have a fresh perspective that is not jaded by disappointment but rooted in hope?

Are we listening to the wisdom of the pages of scripture? Are we reading the stories of our ancestors of faith searching for wisdom that might break forth in new ways through a Still-Speaking God? Words written by ancient peoples describing their relationship with God can hold new wisdom for us in these times. We can hear our ancestors crying out for a time without violence as they wrote in Isaiah: "God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Or Jesus' contempt for violence

when he rebukes one of his disciples for using a sword against the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus. What else might we hear, if we turn our attention to scripture with fresh eyes and open hearts? How might we be inspired to love beyond difference, to welcome the stranger in our midst, to keep trusting God even when it feels like you've been wandering in the wilderness for decades? There is yet more truth and light to break forth from God's Word. May that wisdom of one of our spiritual ancestors inspire us to continue listening, continue seeking, and to continue opening our hearts and our minds to the many ways God's wisdom is poured out.

May it be so. Amen.