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Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-20 (Apocrypha) and Matthew 25:1-13

Last weekend while most of you were worshipping here, Clare and I and 36 others were in the woods around Rowe Center learning from a wise woman, Robin Wall Kimmerer. She is both a Native American and a trained botanist. She "introduced" us to a white birch tree nearby...She pointed out the horizontal stripes on the bark which allows the tree to breathe! Suddenly, this tree became some *one*...rather than *something*.

She told us how the bark is so resilient, having oils to keep it water repellent and yet so lightweight, it is perfect for building canoes and wigwams...the sheaves of birch bark could be sewn together with cords made from fibers of a plant and the holes filled in with pine pitch.

We were asked to stand still in a place in the woods and imagine being "standing persons" *like* trees...not able to move from our rootedness, yet able to bend, and breathe and even "see" in a way that we know plants move toward the light. As I stood there hearing beautiful bird songs, I felt sorry that these two beech trees that I had sidled up to stand beside, could not probably hear the birds, as they have no ears.

Later, our instructor told us that there have been studies that plants do in fact respond to sounds! A kind of caterpillar causes a tree to emit a repelling chemical and they found that the tree emitted these chemicals even when a *recording* of the caterpillars chewing, was played nearby! Perhaps trees *can* hear birds...in some amazing ways...through vibration and wave frequencies that reach their senses...with no need for ears. There is also some evidence that plants "sing!" I recently heard a recording of crickets at greatly reduced speeds and guess what... they actually sing in *harmony*....did you know that, Alice?

Let us be in prayer: God of all Wisdom, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I love the way the writings in the Wisdom of Solomon, describes wisdom as being a woman...radiant and unfading! It says that if we love her, wisdom,...if we respect and yearn for wisdom...then we will discern her truth--even if we have to get up early in the morning!

If we are vigilant on her account...staying awake for the sake of wisdom...she will meet us on our paths and in every thought. What beautiful language! And I used *this* line in my sermon title: "Desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom." Or "kin-dom" as so many of us now refer to a realm of God. God's "kin-dom" means all God's relations...all of creation living in harmony in this life and the next.

In Matthew we hear about some bridesmaids who were wise and some who were not so wise. Marriages were arranged in Biblical times between two families and then the bridegroom was sent to "fetch" the bride for the wedding ceremony. We can only hope she was agreeable to being fetched so that the ensuing celebration was a happy one!

The parable does not mention the bride, but takes place when bridesmaids have some role in the process and are waiting for the groom to appear.... But this groom is delayed. They ALL fall asleep and when he finally arrives, those who were prepared by bringing oil for their lamps...were allowed into the wedding banquet but those who forgot, were left out.

It is a "sorting story" between those who are wise and those who are careless and forgetful. It is only in Matthew that this parable is told and remember this writer seemed to like sorting the good from the bad....but here it is, and we have to sort out what it means for ourselves.

Seasons of the Spirit curriculum tells us that the parable of the ten bridesmaids is about living with integrity and authenticity...being ready for the coming fullness of God's realm, that is both here and "not yet." In Jewish tradition, "oil" was a metaphor for righteousness or good deeds... a living faith that you never forget to bring with you. What kinds of preparations make us wise in the eyes of God? What are we missing by perhaps, not being awake and alert to the realities of our own environment?

Robin Wall Kimmerer is half Potowami...from Native peoples who lived along the shores of Lake Michigan in Wisconsin... her ancestors were forced to move to Kansas...and then again to a reservation in Oklahoma. Her father brought her family back to the Adirondacks...where they would canoe camp in the summers. Now Robin Wall Kimmerer teaches at SUNY college in Syracuse, New York... she teaches the wisdom of Native Americans, AND the wisdom she has learned from a PhD in botany and science, AND from the lessons she learns from plants themselves! What a beautiful combination...her life is a story of seeking wisdom, as our Apocryphal text

suggests...and it seems to me that Wisdom has indeed “graciously appeared to her on her life path.”

So I want to share a little of this wisdom that she taught us last weekend at Rowe:

Her Potawatomi name means, “Light shining through sky woman.” She definitely shines light through her respect and kindness that she showers on people and nature, alike.

She asks us what it might mean to “listen” to a plant for wisdom? Are the plants and trees trying to “recruit” us in the work of restoring our world?

She taught us about “reciprocity”...that wonderful word that means respectful give-and-take. The plants take only what they need and then give it all back through the production of fruits and seeds...they turn light into food...and we can reciprocate by caring for plants and by being grateful...for saying thanks before we eat and while we prepare food to share with others. Thankfulness seems like the least we can do for these gifts of life from our natural world...

Kimmerer taught us to think of our natural world as living beings...not as “its and things”, words that objectify...she has suggested the pronouns “ki” and “kin” for plants and trees...that when we make them “its”, we lose respect and think nothing of wasting them...and yet they too, are beings, created as part of all life. “A desire for wisdom leads to a kin-dom” a realm of the divine that includes all forms of life as relations.

Kimmerer told us about a way of living in the world called “Honorable Harvest.” One classmate said they could be “commandments.” When I heard this list, I said to Clare, “They sound like what Jesus taught, too.” Jesus warned us against greed and his stories advocated sharing, even from the little we have. Listen and see how this list for Honorable Harvest might be true for the way you are in relationship with plants:

When harvesting: *Never take the first one. Ask permission. Listen for the answer. Take only what you need. Use everything you take. Be grateful. Reciprocate the gift. Minimize harm. Share what you’ve taken. Take only what is given. Honorable Harvest.*

When so much of our food is picked off the shelves of grocery stores and markets, I wonder how often we stop to think where it comes from, who picked it, or how to give thanks and reciprocate the gift... We certainly can look at the ways we use this food...for our own bodies and for others, are we wasteful or grateful?

Kimmerer says that plants are the first teachers of generosity...

She also took us into the amazing world of mosses....apparently there are 23,000 different kinds of mosses. Tiny and diverse, hugging tree trunks and steep vertical rock surfaces...they live as colonies and their one-cell-thick leaves are made to maximize rainfall. One single drop of water can be dispersed among the mossy leaves equally, so that each one in a colony receives the *same* amount of water....talk about living in community!

Mosses also need droplets of water to have sex...they have no roots, no flowers, no vascular system and yet....mosses make rich soil of woody trunks and even stones. Have you ever looked at a piece of moss through a magnifying glass...amazing! Kimmerer had us looking at moss through the lens of our minds (intellectually), our bodies (senses), our emotions and our spirit. I think I could become a mossologist! (Not really a word!) The scientific study of mosses is actually called "Bryology!"

The kind of wisdom that Kimmerer teaches invites us to use our imagination...to have a vision for how our ecosystems can be preserved and flourish...she feels there is a movement waiting to happen even as we may feel discouraged with the society we see on the media... but there is hope.

Some of the bridesmaids lit their lamps in expectation.

Words in the Wisdom of Solomon, tell us that our yearning for knowledge allows wisdom to meet us on the path.

Maybe we have forgotten to look for this wisdom...of God, of the universe...right outside, in the plants and trees and animals around us. Of course God is there...in the great ecological web of all life?

Perhaps, wisdom comes when we bring ourselves down a bit...when we humble ourselves...with respect, gratitude and generosity to be part of the process of caring for our earth!

Close with a song....We've gotta humble, ourselves in the eyes of the.....
We've gotta bend down low.
We've gotta humble, ourselves in the eyes of the
We've gotta know what they know.
We, can raise each other up...higher and higher...
We, can raise each other up.....

Amen!