

Sermon: *Wisdom nudges us forward*
Reflecting on Grace upon Grace

Texts: **John 1: 10-18 ; Sirach 24:1-12**

Homily: Rev. Sharon

It has taken some discipline and intention to transition from 2021 to 2022. While last year I carried more optimism and hope for a better year than 2020 (could anything be as hard as 2020!) Yup – 2021!

So, I move into 2022 sobered, measured, and to be honest with some grief and heaviness.

Yet as we draw this Christmastide to a close this week with Epiphany - the visitation of Wisdom, we are invited once again to trust that the Holy Midwife is birthing something!

As Joyce Rupp invites us to pray:

“Holy Midwife, you rejoiced at the birth of creation. I hold up to you the intuited mystery of something new being birthed in me. It has no face, no name, no sound, no shape. I only know that something unperceived is meant to come to life inside the womb of my deepest self. I fail to understand what it might be. My knowing is as faint as the light of a new moon.

I know I must trust in your unfailing care.

Help me to be attuned to the contractions of my spirit, to relax when I ought and push when I must. Encourage me to believe in what I cannot yet see. Be by my side as I await this mysterious new life, still curled up inside my pregnant spirit.
Amen”

And trust we must, in the active sense, though we may doubt.

This beautiful book of Jewish Poetry, Sirach or Ecclesiasticus calls to us today. Wisdom, personified, creating the universes, the cosmos, now looks for a home on earth. She pitches her tent among people, first Israel, and then takes root in all people.

Does wisdom have her roots in us?

Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century Christian mystic, said most simply but most radically that we are not just made by God, we are made of God.

What does it mean that we are made of God rather than simply by God?

John Philip Newell in his 2013 book: *The rebirthing of God*, interprets this as:

- the wisdom of God being deep within us, deeper than the ignorance of what we have done.
 - the creativity of God is deep within us, deeper than any barrenness in our lives or relationships, deeper than any endings in our families or our world.
 - That within us—as a sheer gift of God—is the capacity to bring forth what has never been before, including what has never been imagined before.
 - Deep within us are holy, natural longings for oneness, primal sacred drives for union.
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I remember a time during an Advent retreat in 2016, I was reading the gospel of Matthew to prepare for the year ahead (it was Year A of the Lectionary Cycle). I was so in my head, searching for wisdom and guidance, my spiritual director at the time said to me: Sharon, you are the fifth gospel, now might be the time to read your life for clues of God's wisdom and the incarnation of grace....

John chapter 1 summons us to this with the words:

“From God's fullness we have all received, grace upon grace¹”

And so, with intention I invite us today to reflect on a hard year and trust that from it, Wisdom imbedded deep within us, is Midwifing the birth of something new offering us the grace we need for a new year.

To help us, I am indebted to Wendy Ball and Courtney Martin for a pathway of intentional reflection to lead us into a new year.

Inside your bulletins or on the screen now (livestream), let us begin our reflection – there will not be sufficient time in this service to work through this in detail, but we can start. And you can find a copy to download on the St Catherine's website – sermons page with today's date – to continue in these next weeks:

- So we gather up what has been and lean towards the year to come...
- What are the good things of 2021, something graced or given?
 - o Something you feel proud of or grateful to have leaned into or helped make happen?
 - o Do these offer any clues for how you want to use your energy, time, money in 2022?

¹ Karoline Lewis notes that the word grace is not used outside the prologue (chapter 1) of John's gospel underscoring that the life of Jesus the Christ, is the embodiment of grace itself, once the word becomes flesh, grace is incarnated in human form, among us (Commentary on John).

- Who are the people who have been a blessing to you?
- What are 2 insights you gained in 2021?
- What the sorrows or sufferings you have known? What is helping you hold these tenderly?
- What are the rhythms or practices that have helped to sustain you in 2021 – are there clues here for practices you would like to foster or strengthen in 2022?
- What three books, podcasts or films that stayed with you from this year?
- Where did you see love and beauty and vitality?
- Is there a question you are holding and want to live into in the coming days?
- Is there a prayer or yearning you carry in your heart?
- What do you want to remember and hold close as you step into 2022?

Holy Midwife,

Help me to be attuned to the contractions of my spirit, to relax when I ought and push when I must. Encourage me to believe in what I cannot yet see. Be by my side as I await this mysterious new life, still curled up inside my pregnant spirit.

Let me have faith in something slowly taking shape and be trusting enough to stay in the birthing process.”

Amen