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## *Wisdom, and Proverbs, for the Living of These Days*

Most of us probably think, to ourselves, that we are pretty smart. We acknowledge that we might not have scored at the top of our academic classes, and we don't always win at trivia contests or *Jeopardy* game shows. But, to ourselves, we think we get it most of the time. Further, we prefer events and statements that seem to prove us right. We don't like to change our minds or admit that we might be wrong.

I remember a couple of lines from one of my favorite movies, *Absence of Malice*, in which the actor Paul Newman plays Michael Gallagher, who entices the local newspaper to play their arrogance into a disaster. At the end of the movie, the Assistant U.S. Attorney General, James A. Wells, says, "Mr. Gallagher...I seem to want to ask if you set all this up. If I do, you ain't gonna tell me, are you? No. You're a smart man, Mr. Gallagher. I'm pretty smart myself. Don't get too smart." To which, Michael Gallagher responds, "Everybody in this room is smart, and everybody was just doing their job, and Teresa Perrone is dead. Who do I see about that?"

Yes, we are all smart. Just ask us. And, yet, disasters occur. And we sure do some stupid things. And we sure do act stubbornly and obstinately, as if nothing could disprove us.

Two weeks ago, our Sunday lesson at Evensong was from a book of the Bible that seeks to praise a different way of being smart. The Book of Proverbs praises Wisdom. Wisdom is probably not the same thing as being smart. Being smart might get things done. Being wise, however, gets the right things done.

I was the minister who read that selection from Proverbs at Evensong. It was Proverbs 1:20-33. In the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom is so exalted that she is personified as a part of divinity. And, yes, Wisdom is feminine in the Book of Proverbs. She, Wisdom, is the gift that comes to humanity through the open, unafraid, study of creation and human nature. In other words, Wisdom does come from being smart, but from being smart in a rather classical sense: by admitting truth and error, by being humble, by being willing to change.

When I read that passage from Proverbs, I tried to imagine that God, our God, was speaking these words to our own time:

An error occurred.

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Try watching this video on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

20 Wisdom cries out in the street;  
in the squares she raises her voice.  
21 At the busiest corner she cries out;  
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:  
22 'How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?  
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing  
and fools hate knowledge?  
23 Give heed to my reproof;  
I will pour out my thoughts to you;  
I will make my words known to you.  
24 Because I have called and you refused,  
have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,  
25 and because you have ignored all my counsel  
and would have none of my reproof,  
26 I also will laugh at your calamity;  
I will mock when panic strikes you,  
27 when panic strikes you like a storm,  
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,  
when distress and anguish come upon you.  
28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;  
they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.  
29 Because they hated knowledge  
and did not choose the fear of the Lord,  
30 would have none of my counsel,  
and despised all my reproof,  
31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way  
and be sated with their own devices.  
32 For waywardness kills the simple,  
and the complacency of fools destroys them;  
33 but those who listen to me will be secure  
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.'

I remember another text: "Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days." That text was written by Harry Emerson Fosdick, in 1930. Now, it is hymn 594 in our Episcopal hymnal! I agree with him. God, grant us wisdom for the living of these days.



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