

The Book of Proverbs 1. 20-33

Psalm 19

James 3. 1-22

The Gospel according to Mark 8. 27-38

I wonder if it might be possible to find a single word that could sum up our lives? Just one word? Is there a driving force, an ethic that encapsulates the focus of all our days?

It's a question we might rarely find ourselves with occasion to ask, provoked to examine whether there is one driving idea which has shaped us and by which we operate. There may be rare occasions when we have to face such a question, maybe when we are in extreme circumstances and somehow all that we stand on seems under question, even rather flimsy. Is it possible that there is one idea that drives our world?

I think the idea which drives our world, the world we were born into and the world we will one day leave, is the word *Progress*. It drives our world, it undergirds and motivates our lives. The possibility of progress gets us out of bed in the morning, gets the adrenaline going and sets us to work. I have recognised in my own COVID-induced lethargy this week that at present I can't actually make any progress. I can push against the world; but to no avail. I am hard-wired to plan and to execute my plans – in order to make some progress. But at the moment I can't. My whole way of being in the world is suspended; the pause button of my life has been pressed; along with most of us. In truth we are mostly all struggling with our reason for being, while being stuck in the waiting room of life. As I heard someone say this week: we don't like waiting. It makes us nervous. We want to get on with it.

For about 2 centuries we have been driven by the idea of progress. The world wasn't always driven by it. But the industrial revolution and the technological age have hard-wired this idea in us. We have in the main lived our lives and raised our children with the idea that we, that they, will get ahead. The focus of education is just this; progress. That children will/should do better than their parents. It's what parents orient their whole lives towards, most especially migrant parents who have come here from situations of privation. We want better for our children. Australia, particularly, is a place inured to the idea of progress, which of course includes economic improvement.

Darwin put forward the idea that progress is what the whole world is about; perpetual evolution. The survival of the fittest. Get ahead while you can. Darwin's theory of evolution basically posits that the universe is hard-wired towards the survival of the fittest – of getting ahead, of constant improvement, of the continuous expansion of KPIs. We can make things perfect. We've had a couple of centuries of this now. At the same time as we have slowly been warming the planet. The two have gone hand in hand. And here we are. Cooking ourselves; slowly.

What the planet is saying to us is that our way of being is out of sync with the it.

Wisdom cries out in the street;

in the squares she raises her voice.

Give heed to my reproof;  
I will pour out my thoughts to you;  
I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called and you refused,  
I have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,  
and because you have ignored all my counsel  
and would have none of my reproof,  
I also will laugh at your calamity;  
I will mock when panic strikes you,  
when panic strikes you like a storm,  
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,  
when distress and anguish come upon you.

Last week we heard this same feminine wisdom telling us that she was there at the beginning of creation, like a master worker with God, fashioning the world. The image is that the very wisdom of God is hard-wired in the creation. Give heed to my reproof.

Have you ever sat with someone wise and sought their counsel. The wise often don't have much to say; a few words of caution, a raised eyebrow, a brief word which counsels against a course of action with uncertain consequences. Give heed to my reproof.

The ethic of the last century has been: you can have it all, because we are engaged in progress. Progress which you deserve, progress which is your right, indeed progress which it is your duty to bring about. You would be lazy, feckless if you don't participate. We seem to be hard-wired to say yes to everything. You can have it all. But the earth is saying no. You can't have it all. Give heed to my reproof.

Like COVID, the earth won't negotiate with us; it's not really interested in what we think, how we vote, whether we agree with the science or not, whether we've got plenty in the bank, or not. Like the 2020 bushfires we'll just be swept away.

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;  
they will seek me diligently but will not find me.  
Because they hated knowledge  
and did not choose the fear of the Lord,  
would have none of my counsel,  
and despised all my reproof,  
therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way  
and be sated with their own devices.

Jesus asks: *what can they give in return for their life?* He has just asked the disciples: *who do you say that I am?* Peter responds: *you are the Messiah.* There is a mismatch of expectations going on here. Peter expects the Messiah to be some kind of politico-religious conqueror. This was the traditional image of the expected Messiah. But Jesus tells the disciples that the Son of Man – the Human One Jesus calls himself – will suffer and die and on the third day be raised. Peter is

incensed and tells Jesus so. But this *is* the way it works out. And Peter and the disciples need to rethink themselves and who this Jesus was. Their world is turned upside-down.

Our world; our world so attached to progress and prosperity and survival of the fittest is being turned upside-down. We struggle to protect ourselves against the fires and the sudden storms and hurricanes and cyclones, the never- before - seen floods. And we are being invited to rethink ourselves.

Will we hear the reproof of wisdom? Heed her word? This is not an easy word. Yet, it is a prophetic word which lies within our scriptures. And as we proclaim, the word of the Lord will stand forever. It is a word which acts as a beacon for both the wise and the foolish. A recent survey of young people in Australia under 30 found that 93% of them don't trust politicians and business leaders to do the right thing in terms of climate change and other world crises. Surely this is enough for those with their hands on the levers of power to act. Will you heed my reproof?

We have prided ourselves on the benefits of liberal-democracy, the freedoms and the prosperity, but a whole generation no longer trust it as a system which will protect and provide for them in their time of need. What will we do?

We are invited to spend time through the Season of Creation in contemplation of the natural world immediately around us. To see it; to savour it; to allow its life to enter into us and for us to experience it – to behold its beauty and to feel its brokenness. I suppose it is a way of waiting for woman-wisdom there at the beginning to speak her word to us. We are invited to allow ourselves to experience God's being in the world. In this way we might come to more deeply experience ourselves of part of the cosmic whole. And to hear the voice of Wisdom - Wisdom's voice of delight in all of God's wonder and her voice of reproof - present in all that is. In this way we might settle more deeply into the arms of the one who is our source and our end.

Let enough be enough,  
Let speaking be speaking  
And listening be listening.

Let God be God,  
Be glad for what is.

For the life that breathes  
And laughs around you,  
Be glad and rest  
Let God be God,  
Let today be itself,  
Let the skies and the trees continue steadfastly  
To give you their spacious embrace.

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