

Homily 4th Sunday of Advent December 22, 2024 Elizabeth names John
Baruch 4:1, 36-5:4, 7-9; Psalm 120, “I am for Peace”; Hebrews 10:5-7, 15-16, 18; Luke 1:57-80

The readings today speak of Wisdom. What is wisdom? I remember our son Sebastian aged eight or so. He was making something from a recipe that called for a can of pineapple, drained. I was going to show him how it is done, but he said he had his own idea and so I watched and learned. He used a puncture opener to create a hole and poured out the juice. He then opened the can fully to empty the contents, well drained. It was fresh approach from an inexperienced cook, and it was insightful and creative.

Baruch, a book of wisdom, in the writing style of the prophet Jeremiah’s scribe Baruch, hence its name, tells us that wisdom isn’t about learning or technology. Wisdom, says Baruch, comes from within. He wrote in the century before Christ, well after Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians and with it, some of the 1st temple practices of sacrifice and traditional way of relating to God through sacrifice. It was the 2nd temple period. With a sense of hope, this book was read aloud to a public gathering, not unlike Elizabeth’s emphatic response spoken out loud to her whole community or Zechariah’s burst of prophetic, poetic wisdom in front of that same gathering.

Baruch describes wisdom in the feminine, as being one with Creator, as the voice of truth embedded in the Jewish law. Baruch says that wisdom is *not* amassing wealth and he tells us that wisdom comes from God alone. It’s holy. It’s inspired. It lives within us.

Zechariah, after months of not talking, speaks with the voice of wisdom. He has some profound things to say about his son, about God’s dwelling with us and our being set free. He has been paying attention to the world with his ears. He’s observed others and life around him in a new way, in the past nine months, after being shook up by Gabriel’s visit. He’s likely paid more attention to Elizabeth too, and to his own inner dialogue with the Holy Spirit.

The wisdom in both the book of Baruch and Zechariah’s canticle and Elizabeth’s words, “No. His name is *Gift of Goodwill*, John,” are about hope for uncertain times. What the people gathered to listen learn, is that wisdom is as close as your heart. The divine voice is accessible through listening: listening to the law, listening to inspiration, listening to one’s body messages and our spirits infused with the love of Christ.

Stories, says Margaret Silf, spiritual director and author, impart wisdom.¹ So let’s look at the story of Elizabeth.

A barren woman for decades, she had been shamed and ridiculed and basically felt left out of the circle of mothering. Through this pregnancy and birth of a son, she has found favour in her village, acceptance even. And we heard her wisdom earlier as blurted out to her cousin Mary, telling of that young woman’s significance in saying ‘yes’ to God.

Elizabeth has spent her first months of pregnancy with a silent husband and her last months of pregnancy with her young pregnant cousin. In today’s circumcision and naming story

¹ Margaret Silf, *One Hundred More Wisdom Stories* (Oxford, England: Lion Books), 2013.

we hear the profound wisdom of Elizabeth when she speaks out to counter the traditional wisdom of her community. To forge a new path to peace.

Everything was festive until they started to name her son Zechariah, after his father. The message this couple received from the Holy One, however, is, “No. His name is *Gift of Goodwill*, John.” This is what God wants done, as it says in the book of Hebrews. They know God’s will and it is not to sacrifice, but to speak what they have heard in their hearts.

And the whole village doubts Elizabeth once again. After those agonizing years of shame and ridicule, it may have been very difficult to put herself in a position of controversy again in front of these people whose approval she’d finally gained. Difficult, but she was fueled by the wisdom of her connection with the Holy. And this is where we gain insight into the energy of wisdom.

In her book, *At Sea with God*, Silf names several truths that can be understood with our head, but lived out in the now of our hearts and guts. Among the numerous truths she lists, I want to note these three because they show up in Elizabeth’s story.

1) “*I don’t have to allow others to steal my vital energy;*”

She trusted Creator to provide for her and Zechariah – that was her life-giving energy, no one could take away. She spoke out publicly to make sure John’s name was not taken away.

2) “*I don’t have to steal their energy: I can get my own from the source;*”

She didn’t need to steal their energy, get them to rally behind her to maintain her integrity, she stayed close to the Source and the message she received to name her son *Gift of Goodwill*, John.

3) “*I can trust my own experience.*”²

And she trusted her experience, with Mary, with Zechariah struck dumb and so she could stop these proceedings and insist on a change of name for their son.

Silf also says that we recognize wisdom when a story touches us. Whether in a song lyric or ballad, by a friend or child’s telling of their woe or joy, by a book, or a parable, movie or gospel story, we can be touched by wisdom, especially when it resonates with our own truth. We feel in our heart, our gut, or our tearfulness. Wisdom is Christ Sophia’s hand on our shoulder imparting something profound. It is worth listening to, and worth sharing with someone else. Our bodies register wisdom as insight.

And whether they are statements spoken confidently, or quietly, they are voiced not seeking approval as much as they communicate an energy to forge something new, often a way of peace. In Elizabeth’s case, John’s name from a Divine Source and was a path to repentance and freedom as he made a way for his cousin, *Creator Sets Free*, Jeshua, Jesus.

Whether it is art, literature, dance, or inventions - like a way to drain a can of pineapple - the inspired one shares and touches others with their wisdom. I never forgot that lesson 30 some years ago. May there be a path to peace in *our* listening and sharing of our wisdom stories.

² Margaret Silf, *At Sea with God: A Spiritual Guidebook to the Heart and Soul* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books), 2003, 33.

Question: When has your truth, like Elizabeth's differed from others' expectations? Maybe it was a career path or choice of a partner, or a way to practice that differed from traditional ways. How are you most likely to express/not express something that's controversial?