

Alyce M. McKenzie, *Hear and Be Wise* (Abingdon, 2004)

This book is about preaching from the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. McKenzie considers ours to be a culture that craves sages. She is right. The 1960s told us to be prophets. The 1970s told us to be therapists. The 1980s told us to be church-growth consultants. The 1990s told us to be CEOs and player-coaches. I am convinced that this is the era of the sage+(1) . and so we need to make space in our preaching for this Wisdom literature.

She describes the sage's job description to be threefold: (a) preservation of shalom in community; (b) fool management . protecting the community from the fools in its midst. This is worth a study all of its own . who is the fool in wisdom? It includes the shallow, gullible person; the know-it-all unteachable person; the churlish, brutal person; (c) character building . the type which makes for harmony in both personal and public life.

The message of the sage is an expression of the creative power of God, a habit of uncanny observation that leads a person to discern divine order at work in daily life, and a body of teachings that articulate how to live in alignment with that order+(10).

And then the book is all about expounding the four pillars, or virtues, of Wisdom?

(i) the bended knee – and how to preach and teach on bended knee

It is that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7)qidea - and this, in a nutshell is the whole Israelite theory of knowledgeq(von Rad) and the grounds of their epistemology!

(ii) the listening heart – and how to preach and teach with a listening heart

It is that give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil (1 Kings 3:9)qidea. To cultivate a listening heart is to commit to a lifetime of attentiveness to all of life, one's own experiences, those of others, and the created order. For they are all arenas of God's revelation+(63).

(iii) the cool spirit – and how to preach and teach with a cool spirit

It is that one who spares words is knowledgeable; one who is cool in spirit has understanding (Prov 17:27)qidea. It incorporates the place of self-control and rests on the ability to forego short-term gratification for longer-term benefit+(107).

(iv) the subversive voice – and how to preach and teach with a subversive voice

It is that you have heard that it was said o but I say unto you (Matthew 5:21-22)qidea.

This is not a bad place to begin with a series of messages from the books of Wisdom. There is a series of four messages just sitting there!

But wait, there's more. The author is at pains to keep painting Jesus as the quintessential sage+(28) as she returns to Jesus with each single pillar. For example, consider her listening strategies for discerning Jesus's subversive voice: (a) listen for commonplace proverbs that serve uncommon purposes (137-139); (b) listen for the sound of silence (139-140); (c) listen for that which puzzles and provokes: the equations you can't solve (paradox), the advice you can't follow (hyperbole); the questions you can't answer (140-148) ... before proceeding to a discussion of the parables and the way in which they illustrate this subversion so well.

Paul Windsor