

**“Sophia’s Wisdom” ©**  
**Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT**  
**The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd**  
**March 8, 2020**

**Sounding of the Gong**

**Gathering Music**      *Clair de Lune*, Debussy      Nick Stanford, Pianist

**#Welcome**      Neil Schultes, Treasurer  
Board of Trustees

**Prelude**      *6 Idyls, No. 2*, MacDowell

**Chalice Lighting**  
*(The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith)*

**Opening Words**      Rev. Lloyd

Legacy Chalice Lighting by Paul Sprecher<sup>1</sup>

We light this chalice to honor the memory of those who have come before us,  
kindling flames of wisdom in dark times,  
willing to challenge orthodoxy even at great personal risk,  
giving us a legacy of freedom and a love of truth,  
A legacy that warms our hearts and lights our paths.

*Reflection Question: What legacy do you leave to this world?*

**#\*Opening Hymn 354**      *We Laugh, We Cry*, v. 1 &, 4  
There are hymnals in the seats in front of you if you need them.

**Story**      Sarah Goddard

**Offertory Words**      *March Share the Plate: Create Yourselfes*

Here, we share with generosity what treasure we have with others whose needs are greater than our own. Each week we donate half of our total cash offering to a non-profit program that serves others. This month your cash contributions will go to Create Yourself, Art Therapy for Transgender Children. Based in New Haven, it is an art group for transgender and gender non-conforming children under the age of twelve. Through

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/legacy-chalice-lighting> March 7, 2020

the medium of art, children and families grow, traveling from hopelessness to hopefulness by simply affirming one another.

Please give generously.

**Offering & Offertory Hymn**     *Liebst du um Schönheit*, Clara Schumann  
Amy Buckley, Soprano

***If You Love for Beauty***

*If you love for beauty, oh do not love me!  
Love the sun, it has gold hair.*

*If you love for youth, oh do not love me!  
Love the spring-time that is young each year!*

*If you love for wealth, oh do not love me!  
Love the mermaid, who has many limpid pearls!*

*If you love for love, oh yes, love me!  
Love me forever; I will love you forevermore!*

**#Sing the Young People Out**     *Children's Recessional*  
(please see back of hymnal)

**Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows**

In the coming moments, we will share with one another our joys and sorrows. We do so in two ways.

You may come forward to the mic to briefly speak (or, if needed we will can bring a mic to you). I ask that you speak briefly so that we will then have time to observe our joys and sorrows silently by lighting candles.

**Verbal Expression**

If there are those among us who would like to share their joy or sorrow from the microphone, please come forward now (or raise your hand as needed).

**Silent Expression**

And, now let us enter into a time of quiet reflection.

[Bell]

In this time let us slow down the pace of life, see past the distractions, and pay attention to that which, perhaps, you’ve been too busy to notice. It could be a joy, it could be sorrow, it could be something with which you are struggling . . .

In these moments, ground your feet on the floor (as you are able), relax your body . . . breathe deeply. Reflect in silence on that voice longing to be heard . . . acknowledge it . . .

As the spirit moves you, you may come forward to light a candle for that which is on your mind or in your heart.

**Musical Meditation**                      *Spirit of Life*

Let us remember with reverence the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today.

[Bell]

**Reflection**                                      *Sophia’s Wisdom*                                      Rev. Lloyd

Today’s service is the beginning of three services on the topic of Wisdom. In my other services this month, we will touch on the topic of “truth” and its meaning, and, later, on this denomination’s current and past relationship to the issue of racism. But, today we start with exploring the ancient concept of Wisdom. Before I start, let me remind you that when I use the word G\*d<sup>2</sup>, I never spell it out. // The ground of all being, the source of all, the presence that sees you through the toughest of times, the spark of the divine that resides within each of you, cannot be named by mere humans. It is too big to be defined.

PAUSE

I remember, when I was younger, always wanting to be wiser . . . to be a person with wisdom. At the time I thought that to have wisdom meant to be “smart”. I wanted to be smart, smarter, wise, experienced enough to have all the right answers instead of

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. Lloyd does not spell out the word, “G\*d,” because the term is loaded with many misconceptions and preconceptions. That which is the spirit of life and community, the spirit of love and death, the spirit of humanity, cannot be relegated to one three letter word. Rev. Lloyd invites others to reconsider the meanings of this word, and, to contemplate whether it is a noun or verb. Is G\*d Love? The reader is invited to expand their vision and understanding . . .

flawed ones. I wanted to be a “sage” to which others would turn for good advice. Have any of you had that thirst for wisdom?

For me, it was grounded in my youth. A place where I thought I had to have all the answers. But, when I executed my “smart” answers, they tended to be naïve and wrong. At the very least they fell flat, sometimes irrelevant to the situation, and often missing important nuances. I longed to be wise, and have all the right answers, because like most people, I didn’t like being wrong, making mistakes, and, being out of my depth when problems challenged me. Have any of you ever feel that way?

Along the way, I grew older. I learned from some beloved mentors, I experienced some great losses, and luckily I made a lot of mistakes. I remember that when, as a child still living with my parents, they would try to advise me (from their vantage point of hard earned wisdom) and I would always offer the rather snippy retort, “let me learn from my own mistakes!” Somehow I knew I had to learn things the hard way. Yes, I could be stubborn. Does this resonate for any of you?

As I got older, and before I found this faith, my theology was more theistic and deterministic. Everything had a cause and consequence. Everything was black or white. G\*d was in charge of everything, and all I had to do was have faith and follow the teachings of the bible. Curiously though, the more my mind looked for absolute answers in the bible (the teachings that said “this is the right way” or “that is the wrong way”), the longer Wisdom eluded me. As I circled closer and closer to Unitarian Universalism, I had to create space in my brain and soul for more nuanced perspectives of life, more thoughtful and observant answers, deeper ways of understanding that seemed to elude the G\*d I had once worshipped.

It wasn’t until I got into seminary, still searching for answers, that I began to get a glimmer of Wisdom. The stage was set when in my earliest theological wanderings, I read a book called *The Feminine Face of God, The Unfolding of the Sacred in Women*, by Patricia Hopkins and Sherry Ruth Anderson. I recommend it. If you look it up on Amazon now, it still gets a 4.5 stars out of 5! // That book first opened me up to the idea that the perfect male G\*d I grew up with, might not be the only one with all the answers. More . . . that G\*d might have different dimensions and qualities, and that in these reflections of the holy, there would be different ways of looking at things, different kinds of groundings for my life that were relevant and malleable to meet the challenges of different moments of life. With that book and some others the old husk was broken, and new shoots of perspective began to enlarge my soul.

With that broken ground, I discovered Wisdom, or Sophia as the Greeks named her, living in plain sight in the book of Proverbs in the Bible. An alternative spirit of G\*d, named not for the power to destroy one’s enemies, but a spirit of Wisdom that offered

a source of nourishment and encouragement for how to get through a life journey fraught with joys and sorrows, and, too few easy answers.

I remind you that the Bible as it exists today, is a compilation of independent books written by different men and at different times. We are led to believe that it follows a chronological timeline, from Genesis in the Hebrew Bible, to Revelations, in the Christian Bible. But, their chronological order is not sacred, nor accurate. They were ordered by Church fathers with their own agendas. Further, I remind you that many Biblical books were written as though they were historical fiction. What do I mean by that? That many authors wrote prophetically about events that had already happened. That is to say, when they lived they already knew the history and events of a past people, and then they wrote their book as though they themselves lived at the same time as those people. From that placement of themselves in the story, they then prophesied about future events! A future, to which they already knew the answers! I raise this to say that the Bible reflects human yearnings and convictions and it cannot be assumed to be technically accurate. It can, however, often be a book of human experience and yes, Wisdom, where people search for answers to life's challenges, pain, and mystery.

PAUSE

One of the oldest parts of the Bible is the first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs. They are called the Wisdom Poems<sup>3</sup> and are chronologically misplaced. In a bible that has both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, it falls a little less than halfway into the book. Yet, as I said, these Wisdom Poems are among the oldest writings in the Bible, suggesting their placement served those with other agendas.

Shirley Ann Ranck, author of *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven in Ancient Times*, writes, "Religions and their symbols change . . . In [much of] the ancient world female deities were revered for thousands of years, and only later were . . . superseded by male deities. A theme [that runs] through . . . ancient mythology [in many . . .] cultures is the contest for power between the ancient Goddess and younger male deities. In many of these myths She is ultimately either destroyed in a grand battle or tricked into giving up Her power to the male. This shift in Divine power occurred gradually, over many centuries, and during early historical times most cultures had both male and female deities, with varying amounts of power . . . the Israelites were no exception . . . [For] many centuries Yahweh had a powerful female consort"<sup>4</sup> who served as the feminine face of G\*d.

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<sup>3</sup> **The HarperCollins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version**, (New York, NY, HarperCollinsPublishers, 1989), Proverbs, 939.

<sup>4</sup> Ranck, Shirley Ann, **Cakes for the Queen of Heaven, in Ancient Times**, (UU Women & Religion, [www.uuwr.org](http://www.uuwr.org), 2007) 16.

Proverbs’ first nine chapters speak of Woman Wisdom, a spirit who reaches out to humanity. It is said that she personifies the ancient customs of goddess worship within Israel and other ancient Near Eastern societies. Some say she incarnates the roles of teacher, counselor, and household planner. But, she doesn’t speak merely as a woman subject to a patriarchal society. No, she speaks with divine authority, the authority of one who helped create creation.<sup>5</sup> Some suggest that these passages name that Woman Wisdom was a preexistent being who aligned herself with G\*d in the creation of the universe.

***Proverbs 8: 23 – Wisdom Speaks***

*“Ages ago I was setup, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*

*When there were no depths I was brought forth,*

*when there were no springs abounding with water.*

*Before the mountains had been shaped,*

*Before the hills, I was brought forth . . .*

*Before . . . the world’s first bits of soil.*

*[I was already there and had been there when the heavens were established.]*

*[I was there] . . . like a master worker . . . rejoicing in . . . the inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”<sup>6</sup>*

PAUSE

Joyce Rupp writes in her book, *The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom*, “In many cultures of the past, including Egyptian, Babylonian, and Chinese, wisdom was considered to be something very practical, a means of moral values as well as of right living which is given in maxims and proverbs. In the Hebrew scriptures wisdom is also associated with guidance, but there is a wonderful addition: Wisdom becomes alive. Wisdom becomes a person, a ‘she’. This feminine wisdom is presented as one who not only gives us direction for our lives but is intimately bonded [to a force some call G\*d, and others might call the Spirit of Life]. She is a breath of the Divine, born before creation [and in great mystery]. She is given to humankind to connect them with the Divine . . .”<sup>7</sup> Early Christian Gnostics would likewise describe her as “the soul” and the

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<sup>5</sup> **The HarperCollins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version**, (New York, NY, HarperCollinsPublishers, 1989), Proverbs, 939.

<sup>6</sup> **The HarperCollins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version**, (New York, NY, HarperCollinsPublishers, 1989), Proverbs, 953-954.

<sup>7</sup> Rupp, Joyce. **The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom** (Notre Dame, Indiana: SORIN BOOKS, 2010) xii – xiii.

“holy spirit.”<sup>8</sup> [Whatever her title, she is seen as . . .] a catalyst for the transformation of [a] . . . person’s life into one of light and goodness.”<sup>9</sup>

This is the way she is described in the book of Wisdom [7:22-26]<sup>10</sup>, (a book that was never included in the many Hebrew or Christian bibles).

*“Within her is a spirit[,] intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, active, incisive, unsullied, lucid, invulnerable, benevolent, sharp, irresistible, beneficent, loving to humankind, steadfast, dependable, unperturbed, almighty, all-surveying, penetrating all intelligent, pure, and . . . subtle spirits[.]*

*[She] is quicker to move than any motion; she is so pure, she pervades and permeates all things. She is a breath of the power of God . . . [Hence] nothing impure can find a way into her. She is a reflection of the eternal light, [an] untarnished mirror of God’s active power, [the] image of God’s goodness.”<sup>11</sup>*

Some might also call her the Spirit of Life, the ground of all being, the spirit that calls us to grow beyond who we know ourselves to be, the spirit that offers hope in the face of tragedy, and challenges us to live lives of integrity. I believe that this spirit called Wisdom by some, and Sophia by others, exists beyond the names we attribute to it, but is nonetheless a force that keeps calling us into health and wholeness.

#### **From Proverbs 1:20-21**

*“Wisdom calls aloud in the streets, she raises her voice in the public squares; she calls out at the street corners, she delivers her message at the city gates.”*

If her purpose is to act as a catalyst that calls us to transform our lives, then how do we answer?

We answer in the only authentic way that we can, in reflection and reverence. For, the only way we can become wiser about ourselves and others is to peel back the presumptions and judgements we make about ourselves and others. Presumptions that keep us stuck in our brokenness as much as they keep others stuck in the fractured spheres of our lives. Her deep call to reflection and self-awareness urges us to not accept the status quo, and to do the work necessary, take the time necessary, find the solitude necessary . . . to understand ourselves better than we can imagine.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophia\\_\(wisdom\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophia_(wisdom)) March 6, 2020

<sup>9</sup> Rupp, Joyce. **The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom** (Notre Dame, Indiana: SORIN BOOKS, 2010) xii – xiii.

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book\\_of\\_Wisdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Wisdom) March 6, 2020

<sup>11</sup> Rupp, Joyce. **The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom** (Notre Dame, Indiana: SORIN BOOKS, 2010) xiii-xiv.

Rupp writes, “It is Sophia who causes me to hear in my life’s journey the sounds of One who calls me further, deeper, longer, purer, than I ever imagined possible. It is she who guards and guides me, smelling the danger and the smoke of annihilation in my false decisions, wrong turns, and confused times. [She . . . ] draws me to touch into the heart of love, pleading with me to not be so afraid of losing a part of myself in the process. // [She] coaxes, urges, encourages me to come into the deep recesses where I have not yet been transformed. She guides me inward, saying, ‘Do not fear; be of great courage; you will find blessings for your spirit in these dark places of your deepest self. You will bring them up into the light and discover that they are your greatest treasures . . . She never leaves us and she waits, giving us the time we need to discover the wonders and the wisdoms of who we are and how we are connected to all of life.”<sup>12</sup>

How will you know when Wisdom is present in your life?<sup>13</sup>

You will know when . . . moments of peace slip surprisingly into your spirit and stay a while,

When wonderful relationships surprise you with their goodness and love,

In times of truth when you get to know yourself and your world better,

When you feel held by an unnamed force in tough times,

When your spirit is fed by beauty, books, art, music, worship, meditation . . . prayer,

When you are filled with laughter and a sense of contentment in times of joy,

When your life is made complete by serving others . . .

***From Ecclesiasticus 6:27-28***

*“Go after her and seek her; she will reveal herself to you[.]*

*[Once] you hold her, do not let her go. For in the end you will find rest in her and she will take the form of joy in you.”<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Rupp, Joyce. **The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom** (Notre Dame, Indiana: SORIN BOOKS, 2010) xxiv-xxv.

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Rupp, Joyce. **The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom** (Notre Dame, Indiana: SORIN BOOKS, 2010) 65-66.

<sup>14</sup> Rupp, Joyce. **The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom** (Notre Dame, Indiana: SORIN BOOKS, 2010) 88.



I close with these words from Rupp<sup>15</sup>

Fireflies danced in the forest while the summer stars wove  
wondrous patterns in the early night sky.

I sat on an old hollow log, pondering my existence;  
contemplation came easily in that forest cradle of beauty.

A tender movement of recognition swept across my soul;  
Clumps of tears rose up in me as I perceived Sophia’s stirring.

How good it felt in the fleeting space of starlit night;  
how easily, then, to surrender.

I, who had known Sophia’s presence like some flickering firefly,  
discovered she could not be captured in the jar of my control.  
On that starlit night something in me gave way, opened up, let go,  
and in that moment of surrender, Sophia brought me home again.

May it be so.

**\*Hymn**     *Coming Home*, Carolyn McDade

**\*Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

In this season of flu and respiratory illnesses, instead of joining hands, I invite you to touch elbows as you are willing.

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. We extinguish this flame but, in these troubled times, not our need for wisdom, knowing that all the while our presence to each other is the greatest wisdom we can offer our community. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Let the congregation say, Amen. (said softly)

Please be seated to sing our closing song.

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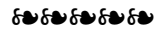
<sup>15</sup> Rupp, Joyce. **The Star in My Heart, Discovering Inner Wisdom** (Notre Dame, Indiana: SORIN BOOKS, 2010) 88-89.

**Closing Song 402**    *From You I Receive, 2 x*

**Silent Reflection**

Let us sit together in silence as we absorb the message and meaning of today’s service.

And, so may it be.



\* Please stand as you are able and comfortable.

# Latecomers may be seated.