**June 28, 2019**

**ADULT BIBLE STUDY ONLINE**

**A current connection to each week’s session**

**3. Wisdom’s Feast**

**Proverbs 9**

Gordon Matties describes Proverbs 9 as a simple rhetorical narrative. A young man has a choice to make between two diametrically opposed women: Wisdom and Folly. The “choice is stark,” writes Matties (*ABS*, p. 22), with profound consequences. This is truly a choice between life and death.

While the primary characters of this narrative are gendered—a young man, Woman Wisdom, and Woman Folly—Matties deemphasizes gender throughout much of his response to the proverb, reading the female characters as symbols and even recasting the young man as a “young person” on several occasions. He does this, of course, to be inclusive. He does this because the question at the center of the proverb, to choose “goodness, truth, and beauty” (*ABS*, p. 23) or not, is a universal human question we all face.

And yet, reading the proverb as a woman, the only way I can read it, I find myself unable to dismiss or deemphasize the way gender is called upon and leveraged by the proverb to make the rhetorical and moral case for goodness. I am stuck, if I am honest, on these women who *represent* the best and the worst, the wise way of Jesus and the path of destruction, standing before a young man who is called to choose between them. I am stuck on the way we all read this proverb from the perspective of the young man. We are the young man. We live every day with the same choice between life and death, Wisdom and Folly. I am stuck on the way the women, even strong, radiant Woman Wisdom, go quiet before this young man’s choice.

I am so grateful for the way Matties encourages us to think about the choice and the call of this proverb echoing in our world today, specifically the “#MeToo era” as he describes it (*ABS*, p. 20). It is an era in which women, more boldly than ever before, are answering the call of Wisdom, refusing silence, raising their voices in the public square of Proverbs 1, and condemning all forms of violence against women. This work, I think, requires that we all look closely at the ways we’ve told the story of women’s lives.

Recently, the *New York Times* published a major story titled “[The Rape Kit’s Secret History](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/17/opinion/rape-kit-history.html)”[[1]](#footnote-1) on the life, work, and death in 2015 of Marty Goddard, the inventor of the rape kit and lifelong advocate for the idea that we can and should prosecute sexual violence against women. This idea today seems obvious—a given, an easy example of pursuing goodness and truth—but as the article describes, when Goddard began her work in the early 1970s, this work was certainly not happening, and the possibility of it happening in any sort of large-scale way had not even been imagined. This is Goddard’s legacy. Though she died without fanfare, almost completely forgotten in the history of the rape kit and forensic science, replaced by a cast of men with longer credentials behind their names, she was responsible in a major way for making us all see and honor the value of women’s lives.

Matties asks us to “rewrite” this proverb to “reflect the #MeToo environment in which we live” (*ABS*, p. 24). I don’t know how to do that fully, how to do that well yet, but for me I think it has to begin with seeing women’s lives and stories in this proverb, not symbolic women but real women who like Marty Goddard and all the women she advocated for deserve to be known and honored by us.

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1. . Pagan Kennedy, June 17, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)