

August 19, 2018 – Proverbs 9:1-10, Ephesians 5:6-21, John 6:51-69

The older I get, the more I realize that there's a difference between being “smart” and being “wise.” Have you ever known that type of person? Someone who is smart, but not terribly wise? Someone who is wise, even though they're not especially smart by most measurements? It's hard to define what the exact difference is. You just kinda know it when you see it.

Even the dictionaries can't do it. Look up the word wisdom and you'll often just find a list of rough synonyms. Webster's calls wisdom a combination of knowledge, insight, and judgment. The Oxford American Dictionary considers it the application of experience, knowledge, and judgment. Harper-Collins talks about it being the ability to think and act with knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight. I guess they were going for the shotgun approach.

It's not terribly surprising that dictionaries do such a poor job of helping us here. After all, all of philosophy is the study of wisdom. That's what the word philosophy means. Philo + sophos. Lover of wisdom. And so all of philosophy, in its unending branches, is about determining what wisdom is, where it comes from, and how we apply it.

As we see in our Scripture readings, it's a subject that the Bible has plenty to say about. In fact, there's an entire book of the Bible dedicated to nothing but the study of wisdom. The Book of Proverbs, written by the wisest mortal man to ever walk this planet, King Solomon of Israel.

And in our Old Testament lesson for today, wisdom is personified as a woman holding a banquet. She's built a house with seven pillars. Why seven? Well, as those who have been attending our Bible Study on numerology can tell you, seven is the number of perfection.

God created a perfect world in seven days. There were seven lamps in God's perfect holy place. There are seven angels of God's perfect Church in the Book of Revelation. So a house with seven pillars is a perfect house. Wisdom is a perfect house. It perfect place for us to dwell. True wisdom needs nothing added to it or taken away from it.

Wisdom builds her house. And she fills it with food and wine and makes sure that every table is set, so that all you need to do is walk in and start enjoying it. She sends out her messengers and goes to the highest point of the city and calls out with a loud voice, “Come and eat. Enjoy what I have to offer. Pursue wisdom like it's a feast. Stuff yourself with wisdom. Go back and eat from it every day. Three times a day. Whenever you're hungry again.”

It's a vivid picture. But it still doesn't really tell us what wisdom is. What is this banquet that we're eating? Where do we find this wine that we're drinking? Well, wisdom herself tells us that as well. *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* That is wisdom in a nutshell. The fear of the Lord. The knowledge of the Holy One.

Simply put, wisdom is Law and Gospel. That's what those two things are. The fear of the Lord. The recognition that there is a sovereign God over us. A creator with the power to utterly destroy us. And He has laid down rules for His creation: His Law, that tells us what we should and should not do. We have broken that Law. We have violated those rules. We deserve His judgement.

And that should put fear into our hearts. A good fear. A healthy fear. A fear that reminds us that we are each guilty of crimes against an all-powerful God from whom we cannot hide.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. St Peter said it best in our Gospel lesson, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

Knowledge of the Holy One. Trust in the one who has the words of eternal life. Faith in the Good News – the Gospel – of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. That is knowledge of the Holy One. That is true understanding. True wisdom.

Wisdom is Law and Gospel. The fear of God and the knowledge of His Son. Which means wisdom is the entirety of God's Word. Every word that condemns us is a word of wisdom. Every word that redeems us is a word of wisdom.

And if you want to eat at Wisdom's banquet and drink Wisdom's wine, you open up your Bible and you say, "Lord, feed me. Bring me into your perfect house. Give me your perfect food. Bring me away from my simple ways that lead only to death and help me walk in the way of Your Word."

Which sounds simple enough, until you actually try to start doing it. Until you try to start feasting from God's word like it's as important as food and water. Until you try to read your Bible three times a day or more. Until you try to turn from simple, sinful ways and live as a child of the light. Until you try to live your life in a way pleasing to the Lord. And then you realize how hard it is. And it feels impossible to do this on your own.

And that's absolutely true. It is impossible to do this on your own. That's why you keep failing at it. Wisdom is not a skill. It's a gift. There is no school you can go to that can teach you wisdom. There is no experience you can have that will show you wisdom. When Proverbs personifies wisdom, it is because wisdom came in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And when Proverbs symbolizes wisdom being offered in a great feast that we didn't make, it is because wisdom is truly a gift of God to us.

A gift of God the Father. For, Christ tells us that no one comes to the Son unless the Father enables him. A gift of God the Holy Spirit. For Christ tells us that His Word is the Spirit and the Spirit is life. But most importantly for us, it is a gift of God the Son. Who was Himself the embodiment of divine wisdom. Such that when we eat His Body and drink His Blood, we ourselves find wisdom and understanding.

Wisdom that is not of this world. For the wisdom of this world cannot understand how God could become man. How His death could give us life. How bread and wine could also be flesh and blood. And how faith in the unseen could offer more assurance and hope than everything we see around us. That is the wisdom that Christ's Body and Blood teaches us.

And it is a wisdom that we see and feel strengthened every week within these walls. That's what Paul's message to the Ephesians was in our Epistle lesson. He tells them the same thing that Solomon says in Proverbs: *"Be careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."*

Paul absolutely understands what wisdom is. Wisdom is understanding the Lord's will. Wisdom is the enemy of evil and evil is the enemy of wisdom.

But he doesn't stop there. He tells them to gather and speak and sing with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. To make music in their hearts. To thank God the Father for everything. To submit to one another in reverence for Christ.

He tells them to be a church. To be the Church. Living and breathing God's wisdom for this world. And supporting one another in that task. So that we can help each other understand God's Word. And find strength in the singing of songs. And uplift each other with the sharing of thanksgivings. And learn sacrifice in our submission to one another.

The wisdom of God is found in Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is found in His Church. We are the body of Christ. Redeemed by receiving His Word and Sacraments. Strengthened in our love and fellowship with one another. And demonstrating to the world an idea of wisdom that makes no sense to it. And yet, a wisdom that transforms hearts and lives in a way that no other wisdom can.

As Christians, we are all philosophers. We are lovers of wisdom. Because we are lovers of Jesus Christ. And that is the only wisdom worth knowing. Amen.