

August 18, 2024 – Proverbs 9:1-10, Ephesians 5:6-21, John 6:51-69

For close to 2 years now, our Thursday morning Bible study has been studying the Book of Proverbs. You might think that after 2 years, we'd be a little sick of Proverbs. And perhaps we are ready for something new. But, overall, I don't have any regrets about taking this long.

After all, the Book of Proverbs is a fascinating book of the Bible. Filled with useful, relevant insights. That connect with the rest of scripture in important ways. Jesus and Paul are constantly referencing proverbs. They get made into whole parables. Fleshed-out into entire sermons. It is a book written by quite literally the wisest man who ever lived. Why wouldn't we want to spend a long time reading it?

But as you read Proverbs, one of the key, overarching questions you have to answer is, "What is wisdom?" This is a book of wisdom, after all. It is filled with references to those who are wise and those who are fools. Is wisdom the same as being smart? Being intelligent?

Absolutely not. Worldly intelligence has very little to do with Godly wisdom. There are some people who are incredibly smart by the world's standards who the Book of Proverbs would describe as utter fools. No, wisdom and intelligence are two very different things.

It turns out that our Old Testament reading for today is a pretty good introduction to the Book of Proverbs, if you're interested in reading it. Because here we have the personification of wisdom. Not just an example of a single wise person. But a person who is the embodiment of all divine wisdom.

And in this lesson, wisdom is personified as a woman holding a banquet. She's built a house with seven pillars. Why seven? Well, as those who know a little about Biblical 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's 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. Whenever you are hungry."

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 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 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 worldly intelligence can.

And so, like the women that wisdom sends out, we call from the highest places of the town, "Come and eat this bread. Come and drink this wine. Come and be fed by the bread of life and live forever. Abide in Christ and he in you. For he is the Holy One and he has the words of eternal life." Amen.