

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity: September 13, 2020
“Hear, My Son, and Receive My Word”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is from our Old Testament reading, Proverbs 4.

The last time I preached on Proverbs, I commented on how this book can easily lend itself to morality preaching. It is extremely tempting for a preacher to take these words of Solomon and drive them down the road of this is what you are to do and not to do; in other words, these words lend themselves easy to Law and not so easy to the Gospel.

Added to this day is the healing of the Lepers in Luke. All ten cry for mercy, and only one comes back to give thanks. This Gospel text is also appointed in our lectionary when one observes on the Day of Thanksgiving where, again, it often get thrown down the path of simple moral living preaching, heavy on the Law, “This one Samaritan was the only one to give thanks, and so should you. Be like him, not like the nine.”

Proverbs is an interesting book that takes much time and effort to study and discern rightly; it takes more time than a 15 minute sermon. Remember, when Solomon began to reign as king over Israel, God came to him at night and told Solomon, “*Ask what I shall give you.*”¹ All Solomon asked for was wisdom to rule God’s people. In humility he asked, “*Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?*”² To this request God said, “*Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.*”³

In the wisdom of God, given to Solomon, he writes the first nine chapters by dividing them into Ten Sections. Each of these sections is an admonition addressed to “my son.” So, you have 10 sections of teaching, that are to remind of the 10 commandments, which are really expositions on the 10 Commandments, and all of these are directed by wisdom!

¹ 1 Kings 3:5

² 1 Kings 3:9

³ 1 Kings 3:11–12

It really helps to know that wisdom in the book of Proverbs is Jesus, the Word of God. In confirmation with the seventh graders this past week, we talked about the depth of Hebrews 11:1, “***faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***”⁴ For what do we hope? Forgiveness of sins, everlasting life, eternal salvation and the grace of God. Faith is certain of these very things. Can you see any of them? Can you see any of them? No. You can see someone engage in the fruit of forgiving acts, but you cannot actually see forgiveness. You cannot see everlasting life or eternal salvation, but faith is convinced, firm and sure, that these things are gifts of God.

Then, in Wisdom, Paul writes, “***faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.***”⁵ How does faith come? How is faith given? How is faith strengthened? Through the very Word of God, Christ Himself! The Word who created all things. The Word who is God. The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word who died for you, declaring, “It is finished! Payment for sin is made. Forgiveness is won.”

This is how God works; this is how God has always worked. He speaks, and He has given man the ability to hear, comprehend, and speak back. Mankind is the only created being that can actually use words to communicate back and forth, and it is part of being made in God’s image. God is present where His Word is, and we must understand that His Word is Jesus Christ. Did He not say, “***Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them***”⁶?

Brothers and sisters, united in baptism to our brother Christ Jesus, we lovingly call God OUR FATHER. Now, read our text from Proverbs, hearing Jesus as Divine Wisdom and God speaking to us, His beloved children, and what do you hear?

“***Hear, my son, receive my words, that the years of your life may be many.***”⁷ Brothers and sisters in Christ, as you have received Christ, the years of your life are not just many, they are eternal! Death is destroyed for you. While these words speak of eternal realities, they also speak to our temporal life.

⁴ Hebrews 11:1

⁵ Romans 10:17

⁶ Matthew 18:20

⁷ Proverbs 4:10

There are two paths, two ways. There is God and not God, there is the way of life and the way of death. It all seems so simple, right? But, these words are hard to hear, especially by Christians. The experience of life does not always seem to jive with the promise of God, as we see it on this earth. Sometimes those who are foolish follow a path that leads to death, and some are easy to see, like drugs, alcohol, anger, lies, and violence. There are even times with the wise avoid these many activities of self-destruction, and for a time will preserve their lives.

Then there are those times that just don't seem to make sense; those times where we see the path of not God, death, and the path of God, life clash in horrific ways. Events such as 9/11 are on the minds and the memories of many this past week, but those are not the only times the heart of flesh questions and cries out, "How is this wise, O God? How is this fair?" We see innocent children die at a young age, or healthy individuals killed in accidents, or are targets of unexplained violence.

This is where faith sees most clearly. The eyes of flesh is only assured of what is seen. It looks at sinners in a sinful world and concludes, "Bad things happens that make no earthly sense, therefore God doesn't care, God doesn't exist, or maybe He just doesn't love me, or I haven't done enough."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the wisdom of God is beyond earthly sight. The true wisdom of God is not simply to know how to live in careful and sensible fashion; it is more. The wisdom of God is Christ and Him crucified. The cross makes no earthly sense. God Himself is crucified for the sake of those who sin against Him? His wise plan for the sake of humanity was to redeem you back from sin and death, paying for your sins against Himself by shedding His own blood. His wisdom, Jesus Christ, preserves your life beyond this mortal veil; His word is everlasting and those things for which you hope, forgiveness and life eternal with Him in His kingdom, by faith in His Word, through His Word, by His Word, are given to you as your possession forever by the infinite grace of God.

Faith doesn't go by what it sees, it hears and receives the Word of God. Faith confesses with Peter in the face of all troubles and trials and nonsensicalness of life, "***Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.***"⁸ Instead of leanings on our own clouded feelings or trusting in our own ideas of wisdom, we hear and receive the words of God Himself. His Word is sure, and unchangeable. He didn't change it to remove Himself from the cross and the way of death for you, why would He change it today in light of the various cultural situations happening to you today?

For your sake, His wisdom, His wise instruction is not given in visions or dreams, but in His Word of Scripture. So when Solomon says, "Hold onto instruction!" he means that we should be constantly learning from God's Word, submitting to instruction. Faith runs to and finds itself where the Scriptures are taught. Home study is good, but cannot be the only way to be fed. The Scriptures were not meant to be simply read alone. The sinful nature twists God's Word into all sorts of man-made wisdom, and so Hebrews exhorts, "***Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.***"⁹

As baptized Christians, and brothers and sisters, this is why we exhort and encourage with God's wise words to help each other, as much as we are able, to stay on the path of life; because, there is another path, the path of the wicked, the path of not God. You cannot follow both the path of wisdom and the path of evil. Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me,"¹⁰ and, "***No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.***"¹¹

⁸ John 6:68–69

⁹ Hebrews 10:22–25

¹⁰ Matthew 12:30

¹¹ Matthew 6:24

Even hearing these words, we still like to try, don't we? Sure, we want to be Christians, but we do not want to be TOO obsessed. We need to live a little, right? Or at least, that is what our sinful flesh likes to think. It is not really living or enjoying life to dabble in the path of wickedness. But it may feel that way to us sometimes.

So Solomon warns, "Do not walk on the path of evil! Avoid it! Do not even pass by it!" That is to say, do not even go near it to catch a glimpse. Take an example from Solomon's father David, when the eyes see and the heart longs, soon enough the actions follow. When we look and stare and imagine what it would be like to do this or that, soon enough we will be doing it. If you watch your friends indulge in the ways of the flesh, they may seem to enjoy themselves very much. You may wish you could enjoy yourself that way. But wisdom says that such enjoyment is fleeting and shallow – moments of pleasure followed by years of regret, or even an eternity of suffering.

This is not to say that enjoyment itself is wrong. Wisdom sees the value in enjoying the blessings of God in this life. But wisdom also sees that God has set in place instruction to tell you which pleasures are against His design for life. He identifies things that may seem good at the moment but lead to destruction.

Faith hears the wisdom in the Word of God. He created life, and He knows best how to live it. Do not be deceived, foolish people do not always go moping around in sadness. In this life, they often feel happy and fulfilled, while you may sometimes feel sadness and experience difficult struggles. While you may have to feel the weight of a cross in this life, Christ has known the eternal weight of the cross on your behalf. In this wisdom, while you cross and trials are hard in this life and bear down heavily upon your flesh, faith knows, "***We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***"¹²

Do not be deceived, even the wicked have their own sacraments. They find their own kind of spiritual fulfillment within themselves, or things of this world. Solomon calls these things the bread of wickedness and the wine of violence.

¹² 2 Corinthians 4:16–18

With these things, those who follow not God, the wicked, seek to lure others into their way of life, as if they must convert others to their religion. They must trick others, as if to show how much smarter they are. Or they must feel the thrill of getting away with something, or the pleasure of corrupting the innocent. They must bring others down so that they need not feel less righteous. They need others to share in their gossip, revel in their lies, and drink the poison of their woke agenda; these are the spiritual sacraments for which they hunger.

Brothers and sisters, faith seeks only the sacraments of God. He has bread that removes all wickedness because it is the Body of His Son. He has wine that covers and forgives all violence, because the atoning sacrifice for the world is His own shed precious Blood. Faith doesn't seek to be more righteous than others; instead it receives righteousness from Christ Jesus through His Word spoken, joined with water, bread and wine.

While the foolish stumble in the dark, the wise sing in thanksgiving to God, "***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.***"¹³ So you need not seek out all the pleasures you can grasp in this life. God has planned an eternity of joy and blessing for you, including but not limited to the innumerable gifts He showers upon you in this life. He is life and healing that cannot come from any earthly healthcare. He has given healing to your body that shall defy death, so that even if you die, you will rise again. He has given you life in His Word that never ends.

He is wisdom that that does not come from the earthly minds of men. Philosophies and wise men come and go. Gurus last for a time. Pop psychology may persuade many. Fads of lifestyle and culture pass quicker than the seasons. But the Word of God remains forever.

In this word you have been baptized, and with this word you are fed. With those eyes of faith, Christ crucified body and blood stand here for you. As you eat His dear body, and drink His precious blood, you hear from the Lord's own Word of Wisdom, "***Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.***"¹⁴ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹³ Psalm 119:105

¹⁴ Luke 17:19

Prayer of the Church**Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity: 13 September 2020**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, we give You thanks for the innumerable blessings You have bestowed on us, especially for the revelation of Your will and grace in True Wisdom, Jesus Christ our Lord. Preserve for Your Church the pure doctrine of Your saving Word, raise up pastors to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ's name, and fill all Your baptized children with Your Spirit to receive Your words of Life with thanksgiving, bearing the fruits of Your Spirit. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In Your mercy, remember the enemies of Your Church. Grant them repentance and amendment of life, that they would know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and be joined to the communion of Your saints. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

To all those who have returned to school, give diligence in their studies, respect toward their teachers, and a desire to grow in knowledge. Keep students, teachers and staff safe from every danger. Bless especially the schools, universities and seminaries of our Synod. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for our president, for our national and state governments, and for our judges, and we pray that they would defend and protect life from the womb to the grave. We give thanks also for all those whose duty it is to protect and serve in our communities. Watch over them as they carry out their duties, and protect them — and us — from violence and every ill. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O merciful Father in heaven, from You comes all rule and authority over the nations of the world for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do well. As the election cycle comes to its final weeks in the United States, grant to all candidates humility to serve for Your glory and for the good of your people. Give the people of this land wisdom to vote and make decisions according to Your Word and will. Grant all true humility after the likeness of Your only Son that we may never be arrogant and prideful and thus provoke Your wrath, but in all lowliness be made partakers of the gifts of Your grace; to those who are elected, enlighten and defend them, and grant them wisdom and understanding that under their peaceable governance Your people may be guarded and directed in righteousness, quietness, and unity. Protect and prolong their lives that we with them may show forth the praise of Your name; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We implore You to visit the shut-in, the lonely, the despairing, the sick, the suffering, the homebound, the grieving and all who stand in need [*especially Carmen, Susan, Randy, Marvin Karstens, Zoey, and those we name in our hearts*]. Whatever their trials, have mercy on them, and comfort them with the knowledge that nothing can separate them from the love You have for them in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! Bless those who approach Your holy altar this day, that they would receive in faith, and with thanksgiving, the very body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Dianna and Amber* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Although we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, we ask that You would grant them all to us by grace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**