

17th Sunday after Trinity: October 13, 2019
“God’s Word for the People of God”

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is our Old Testament reading, Proverbs 25, especially these words, “*Golden apples in silver settings; a word spoken at the right time.*”¹

Proverbs is a fun book. Great to read, and easier in English. My guess is you probably have never heard this section of Proverbs read the way you did this morning. Your English translations will not be the same, as I put it before as you find it in the Hebrew. Here’s why: you had to slow your brain down and read it again. Hebrew doesn’t employ the use of how we would normally speak using “like” or “as” to make these phrases into similes; these are not similes. Many English translations will also reverse the order of the lines to conform to regular usage of the English language brain, which would list the metaphor after the reality, but Hebrew puts the metaphor first. What this does is cause the reader to stop and think about the features shared by the reality. It is a strategy designed to slow you down so you don’t miss the point.

I bring this to your attention, because this is precisely what the parables of Jesus do. By focusing on the wrong thing, you can easily blow right past the point of what Jesus is teaching; revealing to the world only through the eyes of faith.

What we have before us then this morning are Words of God. In our rest, our Sabbath Day stopping in these words, we have words fitly spoken for Pastors and for Congregations; God’s Word for the People of God—*Golden apples in silver settings; a word spoken at the right time.*

This set of Proverbs was chosen because of its connection to the Gospel lesson, as Jesus uses the same wisdom: it is better to be invited up into glory than to be humiliated before nobles; but that only covers verses six and seven. The remainder of our text speaks about disagreements, quarrels, disputes, spats, arguments, whatever you call them, with your neighbor. These are exchanges that could land you in court, simply because of your words.

¹ Proverbs 25:11, my translation

Our text this morning address the saints of God to not be busybodies; gossip has no place in the mouths and on the lips of God's people. The words speak of faithfulness, about reproof given and rebuke received. They speak of the danger of boasting falsely; that is, in yourself, your actions, your words – you. Their common thread is Wisdom.

The dictionary defines wisdom as “the quality or state of being wise; knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action; sagacity, discernment, or insight.” Note what it is not. Wisdom is not the best, most useful, or most expedient use of knowledge; it is knowledge of what is true and right coupled with just judgment as to action. Wisdom is a gold apple in a silver setting, but not everyone likes apples or silver. Wisdom is not always going to be popular. God's Word is not always popular, but needs to be spoken at the right time—wisdom.

Look at these words again, our text speaks of specific wisdom – truth and right action. If you had to pull one word out to embody the text, it would be humility. Humble yourself under God's mighty hand. He is God. You are not. You are not Lord's over your neighbors, you are family—brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. You don't make the rules, you don't change them, you speak them and hold others accountable. You know what is right and speak others to do the same—wisdom.

Once you understand your necessary humility before God, the rest makes much more sense. Be humble before the king, be humble with your neighbor – at least humble enough to deal directly and personally with your neighbor rather than some other route. It also says not to reveal the secrets of another. In other words, let your grievances be between you and your neighbor; not the subject of public gossip. You must be humble enough to receive reproof when it is spoken to you, and to treasure anyone who has the wisdom to offer you “wise reproof”.

You don't always know the right, or do the right, or are in the right, unless you lie every Sunday when confess you are a poor, miserable sinner to God. You can't have it both ways. Solomon urges you to be humble enough to be faithful to God—to trust in Him above all things.

Paul speaks the same, ***“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility***

and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.² Golden apple!

Here's a silver setting – you are a sinner. That is a word that gets thrown around so much that I fear for many it has no meaning. “Of course we are sinners,” you say. We say it as though it means nothing. Many confess poor and miserable, but we redefine even those words. We think of poor in monetary terms; rather than spiritual ones. We speak of miserableness, but we try and cover it up.

To confess poor and miserable is to say we have nothing in ourselves to bring before God. What it really means is that we are not nice people. We are not good or wholesome. We are not the kind of people we want others to think we are, that we like to pretend to be. We dress nice, and we live in nice places. We drive nice cars, and we hang out with nice people

But we judge based on our own opinions, not God's Word. We place ourselves as masters of each other, and desire others to serve my will, not as siblings under one God. We gossip. We do things with no thought for the other person. We do and say things for our own advantage or our own reasons without thinking how we would feel if we were the recipients of such words or behavior. We even justify it by saying, “Well, they deserve it.” Everything we do or say is not evil or destructive – but there are times and places in which we take care of number one first, and forget the other, especially if they have sinned against us.

Most people feel pretty good about themselves. They haven't actually murdered anyone. They haven't stolen things out of their neighbor's garage or house. They don't do drugs – at least not illegal drugs. We manage to keep our lives outwardly respectable, and publicly decent.

But God sees the heart. He sees the secret thoughts and desires, like the desires to dominate, the desires to injure, the desires to be just like someone else, or to be utterly different from them. He sees when we do or say things to get our way without considering how they impact others. He sees when we put ourselves and our goals above others, or above Him and His will and His Ways and His Word. God sees our sins even when no one else does.

² Ephesians 4:1–3

He knows the truth that we can hide from others by putting a good face on and speaking very pleasantly. He even knows the truths that we manage to hide from ourselves.

Yes, we are sinners. We are not nice people. If we saw one another as God sees us, I suspect we could never trust one another, or particularly like one another. We would know that most of the time other people are trying to take advantage of us for their own benefit, and putting another face on it and calling it “business,” or “friendship,” or “being helpful.”

And I am sure that most of you are grumbling inside right now and saying, “How cynical! I am not like that! I am genuine with my friends.” And sometimes you are, but sometimes you are not – that is what being a sinner by nature means; because of our poor spiritual nature, we treat our neighbors without love and this is an offense to God.

That is a gold ring and a gold ornament, correction from a wise person to ears that listen. To hear of sin is not a happy thing; nor is it popular. Wisdom is hearing the truth, even when it is not pleasant. Wisdom reminds you that you are not God’s people because you are so good, or nice, or put on a good show; no, you are God’s people through the death of His Son. You are God’s people because He forgave you, called you to be His own through the preaching of the Gospel, and keeps you in the true faith by His Word and Holy Sacraments.

God washes you clean in baptism, and refreshes you each week with the holy meal of Christ’s body and blood. Golden apple – There, but for the grace of God . . . you would be just like everyone else outside of the church – lost and condemned.

Don’t get too big a head, humility is appropriate. It isn’t fun, but it is the proper use of the knowledge of who you really are, and how you got to be God’s people. To that end, walk in that manner worthy of your calling; that means visible humility toward others – even those you don’t think deserve it, or who are “just not your type of people.” It means gentleness with someone, even if you think they are a jerk! – or wrong! – or evil and manipulative. Remember, you aren’t so clean yourself, except that God cleans you regularly! It means patience with one another, and with the processes that you go through in life. The manner worthy means that you bear with one another for the sake of one another and for the sake of the unity of the body of Christ.

Paul says that we do this in love. We do it in love toward God, and from God. We also do it in love for one another. Wisdom teaches us that we are all alike, and connected by God's choice of us. You are the ones redeemed, restored, and forgiven. You have been called out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light of love and salvation.

The others, however you may perceive them with your flesh, are just like you, chosen and select of God, fit into this great puzzle together. None too good, and none too evil for your association.

Of course, that is all within the congregation. There are people outside who are too wicked for our association. We can witness to them of the love and salvation which is in Christ Jesus, but we do ourselves a favor if we don't make professional criminals our associates, or hang out with the drug crowd, invite prostitutes into our homes. We can invite them here, with the hope that they will hear the Word of God and be saved – but outside of that, there are undesirables out in the world.

But within the church, here in the congregation, every single person is family. If you are unwilling to forgive, you are not a Christian. Forgiveness doesn't negate earthly consequences, and there are times when it is not safe or proper; such as a pedophile who asks forgiveness—he is to be forgiven, but you wouldn't put children and that person alone together. But forgiveness is necessary for the Christian—without forgiveness there is no Christian, this was the very point of Christ's death for all. It is that wisdom that breeds humility.

Knowing the Gospel, that Christ died on the cross for you, to pay the penalty you earned by your sins, Wisdom, that proper application of knowledge, works within you by the power of God to comfort you when you feel the pain of your sins. Knowing the love of Christ for you, and the gift that He has given you in this blessed Sacrament, brings you faithfully to the altar to receive that gift and be strengthened in your faith and in your life in Christ day to day.

Knowing that you have been Baptized, called by name by God, through His chosen servant, and forgiven, having been cleansed by the washing of water with the Word, you can daily return to your baptism and find strength and comfort there by contrition and repentance.

One of my favorite collects prays: Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.

Golden apple – you are what you eat, and here with your brothers and sisters you inwardly digest Christ. ***“Like the coldness of snow on a harvest day is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him...Clouds and wind but no rain a person who brags about a gift that is never given.”***

Unlike humans who brag about many gifts, only to fail in giving them; Our God has a beautiful golden apple that refreshes the soul in death. He gives the everlasting word, He gives eternal life, He gives forgiveness through His Word made flesh and was crucified for you. This is no mere simile, or metaphor, it is Wisdom; it is truth. It is an eternal life-giving word that gives us pause; causes us to stop and hear, stop and rest, stop—so we don’t miss the point.

“From the cross Thy wisdom shining
Breaketh forth in conqu’ring might;
From the cross forever beameth
All Thy bright redeeming light....

Give us lips to sing Thy glory,
Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim,
Throats that shout the hope that fills us,
Mouths to speak Thy holy name.
May the light which Thou dost send
Fill our songs with alleluias,
Alleluias without end!”³ Amen

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

³ Thy Strong Word LSB 578:4-5

**Prayer of the Church
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
13 October 2019**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. For the saints who offer here their worship and praise, that they would walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they've been called, that has God has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of God's holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Church throughout the world, that she would be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His vineyard, and for all pastors in Christ, that they would be kept steadfast in the Word, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all parents, that they would love and nurture their children as our own heavenly Father loves us and provides for all our needs, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our Sunday schools and catechism classes, that the Word of God would be taught faithfully and our children would grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the nations of the world, that those who have been placed in authority would serve with wisdom, seek to preserve life and work for peace, for the benefit of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick, suffering, mentally ill, lonely and depressed, and for all who have requested our prayers, *[including Larry, Zoey, Dennis, and those we name in our hearts,]* that they would receive healing and patience according to God's holy will, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has granted another year of earthly life, especially His servants *Joshua, Cheryl, Cole, Pastor Brandt, and Keith*; that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and that God would strengthen their trust in His goodness all the days of their life; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For the joy and blessings that God has granted *Brian & Melissa* during the years of their marriage; that God would assist them always by His grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards Him and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that He have promised; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For those who mourn, that they would receive the comfort of the Holy Spirit and so rejoice in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who receive the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood at this altar, that they would be filled with His life, love and peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**