

The Second Sunday after Trinity: June 21, 2020
“The Way of Wisdom”

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 our Old Testament lesson from Proverbs 9, especially these words, “*‘Whoever is naïve, turn in here.’ To the one in want of heart she says to him, ‘Come, bread of my bread and drink of the wine I mix. Let go of naïve and live, and go straight in the way of understanding.’*”¹

Fathers are called to be purveyors of wisdom. This comes from our Father, who art in heaven, and these are words of wisdom, and how are to hear them? Who among us would readily admit to being naïve? As wisdom builds her house and carved out her seven pillars, it is important to know that wisdom in the Book of Proverbs is Jesus, and the building language is the same word used for the temple and the altar. The pillar word is the same as the one used in the architectural descriptions of the temple, as well as, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

Wisdom tells us that the slaughtered has been slaughtered and the wine has been mixed. It is through the servants that the naïve are invited to the feast to bread of wisdom’s bread and drink the mixed wine. Now, it is also important to know that the city in which Jesus was born, Bethlehem, means the house of bread.

Ok, so what? Wisdom is not simply knowledge. There are some texts that lend themselves to easier sermons; such as the narrative texts like Abram’s promise last week. Some sermons are not so easy to preach, and even less easy to hear. Proverbs is a great book, and for sermons, it lends itself to make some easy lectures on theology; but, a lecture is not a sermon. The text this morning can easily become a lecture on morality, longing to go down roads that center on you and your standards of integrity. With the current issues surrounding race, ethics, and decency, this is a great temptation; however, it is not a sermon.

The other temptation would be to ignore the words and speak in general terms. I could make this whole sermon about Father’s Day, and I could tell nice happy stories and gloss over anything of real value; but, that too, is not a sermon—and happy stories are not my thing.

¹ Proverbs 9:4-6, Rev. Dr. Koeppe’s translation

So, let's look at the words. The text seems to break itself into two pieces—understanding the practice of wisdom by likening it with human characteristics, and a second, warnings about teaching mockers. We only read part of Proverbs 9, and I urge you to take some time this week and read all of chapter nine—it's short, and sets two invitations before us. There is God and not God; the way of life and the way of death; the way of wisdom and the way of folly.

This is where a sermon can go down the rabbit hole of morality. Many a false teacher have turned this into a moral discourse on laying out the two paths and then demanding that you choose one. The difficulty in preaching this text lies in the Biblical reality that while the two invitations are always in front of us, we only have the ability, on our own, to choose one—the foolish way of death. It is the Holy Spirit's work in us that allows us to walk in the straight way down the path at the invitation of wisdom.

To whom is the invitation extended? The Hebrew word is the young, understood as naïve, the gullible, the inexperienced. Most of us would like to believe that we are not naïve; that we are not simple. We convince ourselves that we can hear Folly's invitation, we hear the temptation to sin, and we no longer listen to it; or worse, we remain naïve and say, "Well, God will forgive me anyway, so I am free to sin as much as I want. I'm supposed to be a child, right? God will understand."

While our faith is to be child-like, we are not to be childish. The Holy Spirit tells us, "***Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.***"² The Word of God is pure and it does cause growth; therefore the Holy Spirit also says, "***You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.***"³

What does this mean? Folly and sin are out of character for God's children. While like Cain, sin crouches at your door, you also must rule over it. While you are a child of God, the sinful nature still remains this side of heaven; which means, as you mature in the faith, the naïveté of the sinful flesh remains.

² 1 Peter 2:2

³ Hebrews 5:12-6:1

So, how does one rule over sin? The only way to do that is by the One to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given—Wisdom Himself, the Word of God, Jesus.

Wisdom builds her house – that is Christians, “***As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’***”⁴

Wisdom carves out her seven pillars – Again, the pillars are used in the architectural design of the temple, and the pillars of cloud and fire. This speaks of Jesus. He is the cornerstone, and from Him all other stones of the Church are set.

What does wisdom say, “***The beginning of wisdom is fear of YHWH.***”⁵ Fear in the Old Testament is associated with worship; thus, the proper fear of YHWH is the proper worship of YHWH which is proper faith in YHWH. Wisdom is built upon the Slaughtered One who has been slaughtered to be feasted on, whose wine is mixed and upon whom we bread of His bread – of Him who is True Wisdom we hear, “***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.***”⁶

This is not an easy thing to hear, even for mature people. When Jesus said these things, when He corrected mockers, He got Himself abuse. Many who heard it said, “***This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?***”⁷ This caused many to turn away and stop listening to Him. Many change His words, and many simply stop listening and search for something easier. Instead of maturing in faith, they desire to shrink back to infancy, giving them the justification in their own minds to throw tantrums to get their way. When they don’t get what they want when they want, they yell, and scream, and pout, and finger-point—going down the way of death.

⁴ 1 Peter 2:4-6

⁵ Proverbs 9:10

⁶ John 6:51

⁷ John 6:60

These are hard sayings. Even for mature Christians, the task is difficult. To be Christian, to walk in the straight way of understanding begins with knowledge of the Holy One. If God is not heard, if Wisdom is not heard, if faith is not fed and strengthened with the true bread of life that came down from heaven—there can be no growth. If the body goes without food, it becomes weak and sick, leading to death. If the soul goes without food, it becomes weak and sick, leading to death.

The only way to have knowledge of the Holy One is through His Word. Wisdom has set the table, offering food from the sacrifice, and the wise, those who fear God, hear the invitation and see the way of life. Here is food for forgiveness. Here is the sacrifice to eat. Here is the wine mixed with the blood of the sacrifice. Here is the servants of wisdom standing before you to proclaim, “Leave the young naïveté behind. Trust not in yourself and your inexperience. Trust in the Lord, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Trust in His Son, the One whom has died and risen for you, and upon whom all authority has been given. Trust in the Holy Spirit, The One Who calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps by using God’s Own Word and joins it to water, bread, and wine, so that you have peace and comfort.”

These are hard sayings to the sinful nature. No one likes to be corrected. Kids put up with it, but they don’t really like it; adults are even worse. This is why the text speaks of mockers and wicked. When you adjudge the wicked; that is, when you declare to one who is evil what is true –injury takes place. The wicked get angry. They mock the truth. They take it as a great insult to them personally and will only listen to one voice-their own. They are the only ones that know anything about anything.

When the righteous are adjudged, when it is declared to them what is true—they hear it straight to their hearts. It seeks repentance, forgiveness – it does so, because it hears the Word, the Wisdom, that is higher than their own.

The Law of God corrects sinful man. It is the task of God’s servants to cry out from the highest place, “Turn in here. Stop your wickedness. See your ways of death. Turn and live. See the work of God for you. Trust in God, lean upon your neighbors and walk in the way of life.”

Correction and change is never fun. Being told that you are sinful, that perfectly natural passions and reactions to things are sin and death is both frightening and irritating. The mocker and the wicked man just take offense and try to make it stop by creating as much havoc and pain in the lives of those they see as responsible for their pain as they can. The scoffer attacks what he sees as restrictions on his or her freedom. The wicked man follows his father the devil and simply attacks anything holy, because having holiness nearby makes the wicked conscious of the evil nature of their wickedness. They don't want to be seen as wicked, or treated as the wicked people that they are – so they strike, they attack, they seek to humiliate, enrage and destroy – to turn away anyone they see as correcting them or reproofing them, or to bring them down to their own level.

In a weird and worldly twist, mockers are those who claim to know better. They are free-thinkers. They can see that old-fashioned religion and doctrines of the past are out of date, too conservative, and no longer relevant. They mock God. They mock His Word. They mock truth, and they mock faith. The phrase today is woke. They are woke now, so they know a better, brighter, more modern and more acceptable way. The wicked are those who do not believe, and do not care to be guided by truth. They want to do what they want to do, and no one had better get in their way. If you correct or reprove them you will find insults, scorn, derision, and hatred.

The wise man is righteous. Wisdom is Christ and the wise are in Jesus. With Christ as the Head, the wise man through God's Holy Word hears God Himself; thus, in maturity he takes correction to heart, is instructed by the discipline of God, and delights in learning because what he is learning is truth. Through God's Word, the infant who has the pure, spiritual milk of the word grows to eat solid food.

The wise, whose hope is in the Lord, whose greatest treasure is forgiveness, life and salvation, is the group that each of us would like to claim our place. I would guess that not one of us feels all the time that forgiveness is our greatest treasure. We probably feel that way some of the time, and we know that it is true, but we don't feel it all of the time.

That is where **reproof** and **correction** come in. That is why the text says, “*Give to the wise and the wise is still more; teach to the righteous and add learning.*”⁸ The Christian knows of now, not yet.

⁸ Proverbs 9:9

While we have forgiveness and peace and joy and eternal life and salvation – it is not fully realized yet. It is a present reality, and yet, there is better to come. The more we know about God, the more we can believe. The more we are in His Word, around His table, surrounded by the faithful, hearing proper correction – we grow out of falling like toddlers and dragging our feet, learning to walk; and we mature to walking in straight ways; not just walking, but running. Through the Holy Spirit, we ***“run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”***⁹

Wisdom speaks through St. Paul, ***“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”***¹⁰ This speaks of correction. Correction is necessary; it is good. Correction straightens us out and helps us stand firm and faithful, so we receive it gladly – even when it is painful and irritating. The wise know that the problem is sin, not the correction, and not the one who is reproving them.

What that means is that the better we know God, and understand His will and His ways, the more sense we can make of life. We can find and enjoy a sense of peace in this life when we see the world, and our lives, from the perspective of the truth – God’s truth. Life makes more sense when we trust God. It isn’t as terrifying, and it isn’t as frustrating. When you are frustrated or angry or sad or lonely or confused or whatever – seek His gifts. Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you. He has placed servants of His Word in your midst for this very purpose. Their task is to hear your confession, pronounce God’s forgiveness, correct and exhort when necessary, and feed you with the bread of life. They are to remind you of God’s abiding presence in all situations.

The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. When you are reminded of this knowledge, your flesh can dwell secure. You know that God is providing and protecting; He is defending you against all danger and guarding and protecting you from all evil.

⁹ Hebrews 12:1-2

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in you.

Make the sign of the cross and remember your baptism. Remember the promises given there. The fears of the flesh are there silenced, Wisdom declares, ***“Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”***¹¹

Why? Jesus has died for you. He has risen to show God’s acceptance of the sacrifice on your behalf. His Holy Spirit is given to you and brings all things to your remembrance that God has said – He gives you the confidence in every situation, as you walk by faith.

You are baptized for these moments. He knows what faces you today, tonight, tomorrow, and He has given you what you need to walk through them; not in the ways of death, but in the ways of life. Sin and death are stripped of their powers, the cross reminds us of that very fact.

See how wise you are? It doesn’t take away all of the abuse you will receive from the mockers of the world, the devil, and your own sinful flesh. It won’t take all the hurt and bad feelings away. What it does is strengthen you to walk through those times. When you feel down and angry and wanting in heart, seek the Lord. Remember your baptism. Seek His servants and demand them to speak God’s Word and give His gifts.

As Wisdom builds the house, we pray,
 “Oh, create a heart in me
 That in Thee, my God, believeth
 And o'er the iniquity
 Of my sins most truly grieveth.
 When dark hours of woe betide me,
 In the wounds of Jesus hide me.”¹² Amen.

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

¹¹ 1 Timothy 3:14-17

¹² From Eternity, O God TLH 411:4

Prayer of the Church**Second Sunday after Trinity: 21 June 2020**

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

Heavenly Father, by Your grace we who were once young and naïve, have been called by Your Son Wisdom to feast on His Sacrifice through bread and wine, and hearing You through the voice of Your servants. Remove from us all pride and vanity, and give to us humble hearts that recognize that You have graciously made us members of Your household, without any merit or worthiness in us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, continue to raise up faithful servants among us, that the invitation to Your great banquet would be delivered in all places and Your banquet hall would be filled with sinners redeemed by Christ the Crucified. We thank you for and ask your abiding presence with all who preach Your Word, speak Your Wisdom, and administer Your Sacraments, especially Matthew our Synod President, Brian, our District President, and Sam our Circuit Visitor. We thank You for the many blessings which You have showered upon Pastor Klinge, his wife Debbie, and the saints of St. John's, State Center, especially for the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments and for Your continued presence with Your people. We rejoice in Your goodness and in the promise that You will never leave us or forsake us. Grant that no one may be left without the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments. Bless Your Church throughout the world so that she may give faithful witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ both in word and deed. Preserve and protect Your people at all times, and bring them at last to the heavenly home which You have prepared for all who serve You in faith and love. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, look upon the poor, hungry, homeless and unemployed with compassion, and tend to their needs. Remove from us any excess love of earthly treasures, that we would be moved to aid when able. Bless the charitable organizations and social agencies of our land, that relief would be found in them for those who need it, especially those affected by the pandemic and the response to it. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, bestow Your blessing on the vocation of fatherhood, that fathers would love and provide for their children, and that children would respect and honor their fathers. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate Father, have mercy on all who are suffering and desire Your aid at the present time, the shut-in, the lonely, the depressed and anxious, the despairing, those in treatment and recovering, and all afflicted in mind, body, or spirit [*especially Carmen, Susan, Ken, Marvin, Zoey, and those we name in our hearts*]. According to Your gracious will, heal their infirmities and give them strength to bear all their crosses in Christian patience. Give continued wisdom to those who lead and those who serve, especially those in harm's way. 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 *Cayli* celebrate her birthday. Grant that she 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.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Dustin & Amanda* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Holy Father, here at the holy altar we are blessed to receive a foretaste of the feast to come at Your great banquet. As we partake of the very body and blood of Christ, which is, for us, the medicine of immortality, forgive our sins and preserve us in body and soul unto life everlasting. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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