### “Wisdom Sets a Table” Steve Finlan for The First Church, August 18, 2024

**Proverbs 9:1–6**

1Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. 2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. 3 She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, 4 “You that are simple, turn in here!” To those without sense she says, 5 “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

**Ephesians 5:15–21**

15Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, 20giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We practice hospitality when we want to welcome old friends or make new friends. Hospitality is an open invitation, and people usually appreciate it when you extend hospitality to them. We have an image of hospitality in our first Bible reading today.

The author of Proverbs envisions Wisdom as a motherly figure, setting a table full of food and calling the simple and the senseless to come in and partake of the food of wisdom. It is highly optimistic about the possibility of changing the simple-minded. I would want to alter that image a little bit, having her include those who *already* have some taste for wisdom, to train them to heighten their taste for it, to learn more of it, helping those who already have some sense. These are the ones who will listen to advice to “live, not as unwise people but as wise” (Eph 5:15), as Ephesians says. We hope those who are labeled as senseless may become curious about those who live with wisdom, will notice how they respond with confidence even in troubled times. Perhaps this will open their eyes and ears to wisdom and truth. We can be seen as the messengers of wisdom. We can let our inner light shine outward, and those newly curious may respond.

We know that those who are *already* beginning to grow up will be drawn to listen to Proverbs’ advice to “Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (Prov 9:6). It is our hope that those who are *already* desirous of the will of God to *some* degree, learn to become *more* desirous of it. Those who are already curious or interested in the Spirit will listen to the advice to “be filled with Spirit” (Eph 5:18).

Those who desire to do the will of God will listen to Ephesians’ exhortation to “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise” (5:15). If we have sincerely sought God’s will, then we will be even more receptive to the advice to give thanks at all times, and to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21). We have been blessed in many ways, and we share God’s love with those around us.

If we have been following God, then we will listen to Proverbs’s advice “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed” (Prov 9:5). The divine message becomes ever more a part of our daily lives.

The big test is: do you desire to do the will of God? Jesus spoke to how foundational this desire is, when he said “Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own” (John 7:17). So if you are truly desirous of doing the will of God, then you will be able to discern what is true, and reject what is egotistical.

But let’s recognize that there are some who have become self-deceived about the will of God, who think that the violence they are doing is good for society and thus, God’s will. We know there are some of those types of people in our societies. In Jesus’ time, the Sadducees and some of the Pharisees would fit this description. But those who are honest and deep-thinking will question any tendencies toward violence. They will say, as Gamaliel said in Acts, that “if this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!” (Acts 5:38–39).

But the Sadducees and most of the Pharisees lacked this humility and willingness to suspend judgment. Further, they were willing to use violence. Their idea of the will of God was corrupted by their selfishness and political motivation, wanting to cling to power at all costs, unlike Gamaliel who trusted that truth would triumph without the use of force. Most of the religious leaders were deeply invested in their own dogma and positions, and didn’t want to lose face. It would have cost them too much intellectually and socially to change their viewpoints. It takes courage to admit when one has been wrong, and to change course.

You might say “how can we know whose motivation is honest and whose is corrupted?” I’d have to say that often you *cannot* tell, and it is not your job to judge them anyway. But we can be wise enough to recognize that the use of violence to promote a religious cause is always wrong. The ends, no matter how noble, do not justify any means. And we can still hold onto the principle that our spiritual beliefs need to be honest and unselfish. We need to “lay aside immaturity,” as Proverbs (9:6) said, and not to be unwise and foolish, as Ephesians (5:15, 17) said. We need to always seek God’s guidance.

Those who have some love of truth within them already are the ones who respond to the call of truth, and come to learn more. Deep calls to deep (Ps 42:7), truth recognizes truth. Those who have some honest desire to do the will of God will be drawn to it, to make it their life’s goal, and will commence upon the great journey of growing up into “maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13), as the previous chapter of Ephesians had said.

Come to the table that Wisdom has set, and partake of the banquet. Appreciate the spiritual hospitality that Wisdom extends to you, and share this welcoming hospitality with others. In this way we share God’s love for us, seeking to bring heaven to earth. And we will learn to partake of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).