

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM
August 20, 2017

- Proverbs 9:1-6** Wisdom has built her house;
she has set up its seven pillars.
- 2** She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.
- 3** She has sent out her servants, and she calls
from the highest point of the city,
- 4** “Let all who are simple come to my house!”
To those who have no sense she says,
- 5** “Come, eat my food
and drink the wine I have mixed.
- 6** Leave your simple ways and you will live;
walk in the way of insight.”

Learn, Love, and Live Wisdom

Teachers, ready or not, are teaching. Parents are ready to have someone else spend the bulk of the day with their little angels. And so students go to school and teachers teach. But why teach? Why learn? More than just information, we want each generation to be wise. More than just getting by with the bare requirements, we want them to value learning so much that they love it. And then we want them to become the kind of people who keep learning and growing throughout their lives.

The words from Proverbs chapter nine give us the same focus. From these verses we see that God wants us to have true, spiritual wisdom. God invites us to learn wisdom, love wisdom, and live wisdom.

Learn Wisdom

One of the best things about the start of the school year is things are so positive. Everyone is overflowing with optimism. Teachers have genuine excitement and enthusiasm. I love the way teachers and administrators wait outside the school to greet students and parents. From the office down the hallways, smiling faces greet newcomers, automatically offering assistance and being as helpful as possible. It works together to create a very welcoming environment.

That’s the picture we get from Wisdom in Proverbs. Wisdom has prepared her house and gotten it ready for guests. She prepares a banquet of wonderful foods and arranges everything just right. Then she sends out invitations. There’s no cynicism, not weariness, no reluctance. It’s a very welcoming environment Wisdom is getting ready for anyone who attends.

You know that proverbs in general are basically helpful. No matter what form or what source, they offer practical advice or knowledge for life. And that's what we get in the book of Proverbs in the Bible. This wisdom comes from a divine source, not just smart people like Solomon. Wisdom in Proverbs is addressed to individuals, each person's mind and heart. Wisdom in Proverbs offers practical knowledge you can use in your life and that will help improve your life. So this wisdom isn't just information. We know it is spiritual wisdom. But not just what is necessary to pass a test or get through to the next level.

Do you know why you have to take tests? I know students think it's just for torture. Teachers think it's to keep administrators and Education Department officials off their backs. But do you know the real reason for giving and taking tests? A less sinister name for them is assessments. They can be tools for assessing how much students have learned and how well teachers have achieved their goals and objectives. In other words, they help both sides involved in education determine how much educating has taken place.

Wisdom is ready. She just needs guests to arrive: **"She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city, 'Let all who are simple come to my house!'"** (Proverbs 9:3,4) There's an immediate red flag there. Wisdom has already performed an assessment. Wisdom finds we aren't wise. We don't have enough information to live the wise life God intends for us.

Love Wisdom

It starts with our relationship with the truth. It's a unique feature of our world today that you can have your truth and someone else can have their truth. And to see what that looks like, just think of any news story. It could be a terrorist attack or protest or riot. We basically have one of two reactions. We either just ignore it, because it's just more bad news and it doesn't really make a difference in my life and I can't really do anything about it anyway. Or we come to a conclusion about the whole issue as soon as it happens. I don't need to know everything that happened or the background. I've got my mind made up already. We wouldn't let 1st graders get away with this approach to wisdom, but we do it all the time. It's not wise. And it certainly doesn't help with the growing divide we see between people in our country today.

We don't handle difficult issues with wisdom. And it's more dangerous when it happens in our relationship with spiritual truth. Who receives an invitation from wisdom? The servants call out: **"Let all who are simple come to my house!"** and then extend it to **"To those who have no sense."** (Proverbs 9:4) That's actually a pretty polite way of putting it. It's an invitation to the foolish and susceptible to deception. Simple people are inexperienced or immature. They are open to influence. People who have no sense don't comprehend the consequences of their actions.

You may be on a spiritual journey or you may have a spiritual background that stretches back before you can remember. But if you don't realize wisdom is inviting you, you will miss out. If you ignore this invitation because you think you know enough already or don't care to know, you will be led into spiritual danger and destruction. This is every human being.

Apart from God, we are naturally inclined away from God, in the opposite direction of wisdom. We can't figure things out on our own. We don't even know what we don't know.

That's the beauty of the invitation we see in Proverbs chapter 9. It goes out to every person, regardless of how smart they are or think they are. It goes out without any strings attached or conditions written in the fine print. From the rest of the Book of Proverbs, we find that wisdom isn't just information or knowledge. A few verses later in Proverbs chapter 9 we learn: **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."** (Proverbs 9:10) This fear of God isn't some scare tactic to coerce us into good behavior. It is a loving relationship started and kept going by God himself. In Proverbs all wisdom comes to human beings through this relationship with God. You can have lots of bits of wisdom and spiritual habits you practice every day, but you miss out on true wisdom without seeing that the heart of wisdom is God coming to humans in Jesus Christ.

There's a powerful connection between the banquet set out by Wisdom in Proverbs and the teaching Jesus does after his miraculous feeding of the 5,000 in John chapter 6. Wisdom calls out: **"Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed."** (Proverbs 9:5) Jesus enlightens the crowds: **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."** (John 6:35) He leaves no room for mistakes or fake news: **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** (John 6:51) Jesus extends the invitation. Jesus offers a life-giving banquet free of charge. Learn wisdom. Love wisdom.

There's a reason why parents tell their kids to stay in school. And it's not just because they don't want to be giving them gas money when they're 32 years old. And it's not just because they don't want to spend all their savings on bail money. Parents want their children to stay in school until they find a purpose and calling in life. They want them to have knowledge, yes. But they also want them to be able to have all the opportunities they need to get ahead in life, to find success and fulfillment in whatever they do. So stay in school up to whatever level of education you need and as long as the finances don't run out for you to figure that out.

Live Wisdom

Getting to know Jesus is just the starting place for wisdom. Knowing who he is and what he has done for a world of naive and easily influenced human beings is a great foundation. But wisdom doesn't prepare a lavish banquet and send out invitations just so you can nod your head and recognize what's going on. Jesus wants you to come. Jesus wants you to know and to love and to experience his blessings. Wisdom invites you into a relationship of lifelong learning built around Jesus: **"Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed."** (Proverbs 9:5)

Here's a key to understanding biblical wisdom. We sometimes take a dangerous shortcut when we read the Bible and then apply it directly to our lives. Instead, direct everything in Scripture through the cross of Jesus Christ and then to yourself. Then learning and loving

wisdom develops wisdom in the lives of God's people. When students go to school and learn from their teachers, they will see how education has an impact on life. Wisdom that leads to Jesus makes this invitation: **"Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight."** (Proverbs 9:6) You don't have to stay stuck in the gullibility that doesn't know any better. We can be open-minded and wise Christians. That means we evaluate any supposed spiritual wisdom on whether it brings us closer to Jesus or not.

Ready for the controversial part? This actually shouldn't be controversial. Unfortunately, recent events in our country mean we need to make it clear that although many Christians are socially conservative, you can't be racist and be Christian. Your politics might lean right, but there's no connection between biblical wisdom and the alt-Right. None. In fact, with Christian wisdom at the core of our identity, we have a unique take on issues that divide us. We have one Creator and one Redeemer. Jesus gave his life to make us his people, one people united by His blood. That means you and I can do something extreme. We can look at people spouting hate and see them as souls. We can see people misguided by an ideology of hatred, but they are simple and lacking in sense. More than anything else, they need true wisdom from Jesus Christ.

A man got tired of looking at a big boulder in his front yard. So he decided one day to turn the ugly thing into a piece of art. He took his hammer and chisel and went to work. Day after day he chipped away at the huge boulder until one day it took shape. When it was finished, there stood an attractive stone elephant. A neighbor asked, "How did you ever carve such a likeness as that elephant?" The man answered, "I just chipped away everything that didn't look like an elephant." If you have anything in your life that doesn't look like love and compassion, with the help of God, chip it away. If you see hatred, prejudice, envy, vengeance in your heart, chip it away. That's the way the Spirit of God shapes the sinner into the image of Christ.¹

I pray everyone does their best, studies hard and prepares well for each day of this school year. But more importantly, I pray the Lord opens your hearts to the foolish grace of your God who seeks you and goes after you and makes you his own. I pray everyone has a great school year this year. But more importantly, I pray the Lord brings you into a trusting relationship with true Wisdom. I pray everyone does their best, studies hard and prepares well for each day. But even better, I pray you enjoy the new life you have through this relationship of trust in Jesus Christ. And for all the challenging and confusing issues you face each day, keep going back to Jesus. With his wisdom you will find your nourishment for your faith and your strength for life's challenges. Come. Come to Jesus and learn wisdom, love wisdom, and live wisdom. Amen.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him. Amen.

¹ James W. Moore, *Some Things Are Too Good to Be True*. Nashville: Dimensions, 1994, p 32.