

Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom built her house;
she has carved out her seven pillars.

²She slaughtered her animals,
mixed her wine,
and set her table.

³She sends out her female servants; she issues an invitation
from the top of the city heights:

⁴“Whoever is naive turn aside here,”
she says to those who lack sense.

⁵“Come, eat my food,
and drink the wine I have mixed.

⁶Abandon your simplistic ways and live;
walk in the way of understanding.”

Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ So be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly. ¹⁶ Take advantage of every opportunity because these are evil times. ¹⁷ Because of this, don't be ignorant, but understand the Lord's will. ¹⁸ Don't get drunk on wine, which produces depravity. Instead, be filled with the Spirit in the following ways: ¹⁹ speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; sing and make music to the Lord in your hearts; ²⁰ always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and submit to each other out of respect for Christ.

John 6:51-58

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” 52 Then the Jews debated among themselves, asking, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 Jesus said to them, “I assure you, unless you eat the flesh of the Human One[g] and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55 My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me lives because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. It isn't like the bread your ancestors ate, and then they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Today we're starting a four week series entitled, "Postures of the Life of Faith." For the next four weeks, we'll explore how the postures of wisdom, guidance, discernment, and action form us as people of faith. This offers us a different way to access the blessings of the lectionary. It allows us to focus on a particular theme within this week's reading even as we see it relate to the weeks before and after. It's something like following a path on a hike, seeing how the terrain that you currently walk is born from the earth behind you and bears forth the ground in front of you. In other words, there's a connection, a logic, a web of meaning within the lectionary, and following a series in help to magnify this network for us in ways that we might otherwise miss.

So today, our focus is wisdom because the readings from Proverbs and Ephesians both speak to us of gaining wisdom. Proverbs presents a metaphor of wisdom, a woman who prepares for a celebration meal, inviting the naïve to come feast upon what sustenance wisdom offers. Wisdom, it seems, is as normal as eating at a party. In Ephesians, Paul offers the pithy advice to “be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly.” And just in case that wasn’t clear enough, Paul provides the least tactful and yet most helpful advice. Don’t get drunk. Instead, speak to one another in beautiful ways. Praise God. Be thankful. Accept the guidance of your sisters and brothers in faith. In both readings, wisdom seems fairly simple, easily acquired, easily known.

But if this is true, why does our world seem so desperately unwise, so deeply foolish? The most spiteful and vicious presidential candidates seem to gather the most support, a reality that betrays a profound lack of wisdom.

Celebrities find themselves in the midst of hard drugs and recklessly speeding cars, risking their fortunes and the positive parts of their fame, all of which surely seems unwise. Our governments reduce funding for our schools, increase funding for bullets, and wonder why our culture seems so sickly violent, which reveals a vortex of foolishness. With such rampant foolishness so present in our lives, the apparent simplicity of wisdom seems much more complex.

This highlights the significant difference between knowing something and doing something, between recognizing wisdom and acting wisely. For instance, we all know that reacting in anger instead of compassion when someone makes a mistake is not wise. Yet, it happens all too often. We all know that human use of fossil fuels and production of garbage has incredibly negative effects upon the earth, but many of us continue to increase, rather than decrease, our carbon footprints. This is not wise. We see

foolishness in our public and private lives because we don't act in ways consistent with the wisdom close to our hearts.

This is foolish.

The heart of wisdom lies where our knowledge meets our activity, where our knowing meets our doing, where we act consistently with what we know is right. For years, I knew internally that I'd feel better if I exercised more often, or at all. But instead of living that way, I just ignored what I knew was right because, well, change is hard. It's easier to stay the same, even if staying the same means I like myself less and less. There's a sickness here. When we deny the invitation of wisdom to sit at her table and take up what is good, when we stare wisdom in the face and instead actively choose foolishness, that's a cancer in our souls that grows foolishness rather than wisdom.

If we take stock of what today's scriptures have to say, it seems that wisdom is something like common sense. That's

where Paul's example of drunkenness really comes in to play, because it is common sense that drunk people aren't in control. Wisdom is difficult enough when our brains aren't impaired, but when we're under the influence, our bodies and minds are blind to wisdom and instead misguided by false gods, by harmful substances that pervert our ability to know and do wisdom. Of course, we know that it's not only alcohol that impairs us, it's not only drugs that affect our minds and bodies. We become intoxicated with the idolatry of sin, and the deep danger of sin is that sin offers us foolishness and tells us it's wisdom.

The Seven Deadly sins are a telling example of this tendency. Lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride each intoxicate as an overdose of something that seems good to us. Intimacy and sexuality are good gifts from God, but lust turns people into commodities, into the objects of our selfish search for satisfaction. God made food

to satisfy our bodily hunger, but we turn it into an idol, the lord of our stomachs. God provides for our needs every day, but greed says we must acquire more than we need, an act not only of fear, but of distrust of God. Sabbath rest is a god-given gift, but sloth refuses the goodness of work and ignores the needs of the world around us. Wrath, and envy, and pride each do this as well, turning something good upon it's head, making an idol out of God's good gifts, presenting folly as wisdom.

And that's the hardest part of all with wisdom. It's not just knowing what's right not evening doing what's right, but knowing where to listen for what is right. For years, wisdom prevailed that the stock market would always go up and the housing market bubble would never burst. We all saw the folly of that thinking in recent years, even though everyone seemed to think it was true before the crashes. So how do we know what is wisdom, when even the common

sense of our culture seems to eventually crash down around us?

A gift of our faith is that we have a well of wisdom at our disposal, both in Scripture and in the church community. Paul today offers us simple things, reaffirmations of basic knowledge that, in fact, offer a depth of wisdom to our souls. Were you given something? Be thankful for it, not just in your head or your heart, but with your actions. Speak to each other not in violent accusatory ways, but with hymns, songs, and spiritual songs, with words of beauty, harmony, and truth. When you need guidance or assistance, ask one of these people around you! Don't go it alone, for we all bear the mark of Christ and the hope of salvation, and so we all share the joy and responsibility of discovering and living wisdom in this world. Don't walk this walk alone, but seek out God's direction, seen most fully in Jesus Christ, who we meet in the words of the Bible and the images of God,

the human creations that reflect God alive and at work in the world. That's the wisdom of God.

So, when the witness of the world seems to contradict the witness of Jesus, look to the incarnate God for wisdom. When investment bankers sell you selfishness and Jesus tells you to give to those who ask, know that wisdom comes from God. When a country tries to sell you war and Jesus tells you that the peacemakers are blessed, remember that wisdom comes from God. When our culture tries to sell you fear of people, whether of a different race or religion or sexual orientation or nationality, remember that Jesus Christ taught us perfect love is the only thing that casts out fear. Equality, dignity, and reconciliation are inherent to God's message of wisdom over against the divisive foolishness of the world.

With that wisdom comes two things, a holy urgency and a divine peace. Once I began to exercise, I found myself convicted that this was, in fact, wise, despite all of

my rebellious denial before. My body started to regulate, as did my mood and my sleep patterns. I'm not a health nut, but I'm a healthier person than I've been in years, in large part because I finally accepted wisdom from my wife and friends that I needed to reorient my life around healthy habits. That's the holy urgency, a sense that wisdom needs lived out, needs practiced, even in the face of challenges. The divine peace comes in many forms. Now that I know I'm on the right path, I celebrate this body daily, despite all the flaws and imperfections, as a gift from God. Not my future body or my goal weight but where I'm at right now. I've got peace that I know I don't have as much time for things I used to do because I'm spending more time working out, but it's made me a better husband, a more attentive pastor, and a healthier person, which is certainly worth the sacrifice.

Wisdom is knowing what's right, doing what's right, and knowing that, when things don't seem so clear, God, the author of wisdom, speaks to us through scripture and through our neighbors, the human creatures who bear God's image. Wisdom is that common sense that speaks against those deadly sins that our culture celebrates. Wisdom contradicts the selfishness and sinfulness of the world. Wisdom is the witness of Jesus alive in our daily lives. Let us live together, choosing, acting out, and seeking wisdom of God. Amen.