

Pentecost 13 (Proper 15), August 19, 2018

Sermon: Wisdom

Text: JOHN 6:51–69

Other Lessons: Proverbs 9:1–10; Psalm 34:12–22; Ephesians 5:6–21

Proverbs 9:1-10

**Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.
2 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.
3 She has sent out her young women to call
from the highest places in the town,
4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”
To him who lacks sense she says,
5 “Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Leave your simple ways, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”
7 Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,
and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.
8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;
reprove a wise man, and he will love you.
9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.**

Ephesians 5:6–21

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not associate with them; 8 for at one time, you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the

best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

John 6:51–69

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.”

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

How do you define wisdom? How do you understand wisdom?

Would you know it when you see it? Would what you hear

resonate as wisdom or foolishness? Well...that all depends on what you're looking at and what you're listening to, right? Besides that, wisdom is defined and understood in so many different ways nowadays. We all have our different versions; our different understandings of what constitutes wisdom.

For some, wisdom is symbolized by a degree, a diploma, a well-used office library, or a doctor's lab coat. Maybe that's true, but you know as well as I do that there are plenty of people out there with all kinds of "book wisdom" who are as dumb as a box of rocks!

Other people, especially in our media-driven culture, recognize wisdom as a well-dressed person with a "snooty British accent."

For others, (not so much in our culture nowadays, but in other cultures around the world,) wisdom has the appearance of an aged, white-haired elderly person. Elders have lived life. They're wise in the ways of the world. They have much wisdom to pass on, if only you take the time to listen.

For still others, wisdom is correlated with materialism; it's recognized in terms of wealth and prosperity. If you've got money and you're well-to-do, then you must be wise. If you're broke and down on your luck, maybe homeless or something like that, then you're obviously not wise. Such is the way we often understand wisdom.

In the same way, we can come at this from the other side too. What does wisdom NOT look like and sound like? Well...if you're a teenager, wisdom does not look or sound like your parents, at least not right now. (That perception will change when you grow up and have kids of your own—I promise you!) If you're a wife, wisdom does not look or sound like the loving, yet determined husband who refuses to pull over and ask for directions. As an employee, wisdom is rarely ever associated with the boss.

What about the wisdom of faith? Is this the same sort of wisdom as the many different types of wisdom the world has to offer? Is it just one of many types of wisdom, or is it something altogether different? What does the wisdom of faith even look like or sound like? Perhaps the best place to start is by asking what the wisdom of faith does NOT look like or sound like.

Many people condemn the wisdom of faith; the wisdom of the crucified Christ, because it's too restrictive and too exclusive; it's not politically-correct. *“Who are you to say that all spiritual paths aren't equally valid and enlightening? Who are you to judge me, calling my personal choices and opinions and lifestyle choices 'sin'? If that's what being a Christian is, then I don't want anything to do with it!”* Such an exclusive approach to faith, daring to speak the truth about true doctrine and false doctrine, is often viewed by many, some Christians included, as being very

foolish; very bad for business; very unwise.

Others condemn the wisdom of faith by dismissing Christ and the cross as just another children's fairy tale. I know you've all heard the accusation that Christians are weak-minded fools who need some sort of "fairy tale crutch" in order to feel wanted, loved, and important. Highly-educated men denounce faith because "science plainly disproves such mythological foolishness."

Of course, there are also people who slam me, slam the Church, and slam Christ, denouncing all of it as pure foolishness based solely on the "wisdom" of their feelings, emotions, and what their heart leads them to believe—no academics, no science, no logic; just what they feel inside. "I don't like what you're saying; what you're doing. You hurt my feelings. My Jesus would never say anything like that. My Jesus would never do anything like that."

Suffice it to say, the wisdom of faith does not sound like any of these different worldly versions of wisdom, does it?

Ahhh...as easy as it is to recognize this faithless non-wisdom in the unbelieving masses, it's important to understand that this isn't the group Jesus was talking to in our lesson for this morning. If you read your Gospel lesson, particularly in verses 60 & 66, you will discover that Jesus was talking to a large group of His disciples, those who had sought Him out and followed Him across the lake after He had miraculously fed 5000 of them a day earlier.

Think about that for a minute. These were disciples of Christ, self-proclaimed followers of Jesus, who turned and walked away from Him simply because they didn't understand something. These were disciples who turned away because Jesus said something that rattled their cage and offended them. Be honest: Do you think this sort of thing still happens today? One look in the mirror of God's Law and we are confronted with the damning truth that it does—in our own daily lives all the time. “You mean murder includes all that? Adultery includes all that? Obedience and submission to Christ means that, too? I don't think I like that. Only a fool would buy into all of that. Here's what I think it really means for me in today's day and age.”

As a baptized and redeemed child of Christ, what does true Christian wisdom look like and sound like, no matter what day and age you're living in; no matter where you call home? It really is a no-brainer, isn't it? To begin with, true Christian wisdom looks and sounds like penitent confession. “Yes—I have heard Your Word of wisdom; Your Word of Law and Gospel, and I have examined myself in light of this Wisdom. I confess that I have sinned miserably in thought, word, and deed. I throw myself on the mercy of Your court. Forgive me, Lord, not on account of my merit or worthiness, but on account of Jesus Christ and all that He's done for me.”

My brothers and sisters in Christ: That's it! True wisdom looks

and sounds like Jesus Christ. This [the crucifix] is God's eternal and unchanging Wisdom. I know it doesn't make sense to us. I know the rest of the world calls this foolishness. Even some Christians call this foolishness. "How are you going to grow the church? How are you going to keep the kids entertained? How are you going to appeal to Baby Boomer seekers? This isn't what they want! We're being foolish if we think just this [Word and Sacrament ministry] is going to make disciples." I make no apologies. God's Wisdom looks like failure; it looks like a dead man hanging on a blood-soaked cross. The wisdom to behold such a gruesome thing and recognize it as the one thing needful for all life, forgiveness, and salvation; the wisdom to behold this icon of death and defeat as an all-atoning sacrifice that has already brought us complete forgiveness and eternal life; that wisdom can only come from God.

True Wisdom sounds like the very voice of our triumphant Lord and Savior, speaking His Law and Gospel to our hearts, calling us to repentance and the life and love that is ours in Him alone. Do we always understand? Are we never going to be offended by what we hear because we're followers of Christ? Absolutely not! Everybody loves to hear sin preached on so long as it's not their sin being preached on! True, faithful wisdom, however, hears Christ and takes Him at His Word, even when we don't fully understand it; even when our fallen reason and logic wants to

disagree and justify itself.

Think about that. We're never told in the Gospel that the Twelve understood everything Christ was talking about in His bread of life discourse. We're told that they believed Him, having been brought, through Christ's Word, to the wisdom that He is the Holy One of God. **“Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life. My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him.”** To this day, most people hear this and thumb their noses at Jesus and walk away, choosing something of their own liking; something that makes sense to them and suits them. Such cannibalistic talk sounds so foolish and unwise. Only a fool would actually believe that Jesus is referring to His true flesh and His true blood.

The apostles, on the other hand, wisely stick around. They don't follow the wisdom of the world. They remain in faith. They don't understand everything Christ just said. In fact, Scripture tells us many times that these twelve didn't understand. But they believed. **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and we have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.”** That's faith. That's true and faithful wisdom.

My friends: The very wisdom of God is witnessed right here in the fact that you do believe and trust in this blessed reality; that you do

have saving faith. Through the working of the Holy Spirit in the very Word of God that we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, our Lord is actively creating and sustaining the very faith and wisdom we need to forsake all other wisdoms and ways of the world and to simply behold and cleave to these heavenly pearls of wisdom and life and salvation. This is what we confess in the Third Article of the Creed: **I believe that I cannot by my own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies me in/by the Gospel.** Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are—regardless of age, race, IQ, health or financial status—resurrected into new life; the life that is ours in Christ Jesus; the new life that is apprehended and understood only in the wisdom of saving faith.

As we close, I praise God for His grace, His mercy, and His active work in this little congregation because it is only by His grace, mercy, and working that we are able to hear the words of our Gospel lesson for this morning and easily identify ourselves with the faithful Twelve and with all the communion of saints, saying, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? Where else would we be? You have the words of eternal life.”** By God’s grace and working, may this be your wisdom, now and forevermore.

AMEN

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

