

August 15th, 2021

Year B; 12th Pentecost

Proverbs 9: 1-6

Psalm 34: 9-14

John 6: 51-58

Proverbs 9:1-6

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

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

We live in prickly, argumentative times, in our county, our state, our country, our world. Though, as our world is populated by humans, I realize most of human history has been marked by, at best disagreements, at worst open conflict.

And as Christians we are still called, within all of our gruesome conflicts, to remember that all humans are made in the image of God.

This week, the dominant issue in the United States seemed to be: Wearing a

mask in school, is that child abuse or a public health recommendation to lower germ transmission?

Far graver issues occupy others, with the Taliban's rapid advances in Afghanistan, and first a president assassinated in Haiti last month, and now a deadly earthquake hitting yesterday.

We are living in painful, contentious times.

And our reading today, a rare inclusion in the lectionary from the Book of Proverbs, speaks of wisdom, offering a breath of hope in our complex world.

Much of Proverbs is made up of wise sayings, offering brief words to live by. But our reading comes from the couple of chapters that are not sayings, but longer narratives.

This reading shows Wisdom personified as a Woman and has caught folks' attention over the ages. This Woman of Wisdom image is obviously unusual in the Bible, especially in a book likely written in the 900s b.c. Even more so than showing Wisdom as a Woman in charge, is the previous chapter in which Wisdom speaks and she tells us that she was present at creation with God.

Chapter 8, verses 22-24 read:

*The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.*

*Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*

When there were no depths I was brought forth,

when there were no springs abounding with water.

This Woman of Wisdom is portrayed as close to God and active in our world.

So, what can we weary folks receive, what can we learn from Wisdom?

First, though we are weary, what do we humans want, what do we work towards? In other words, before we bother to listen to Wisdom, do we humans want to grow in wisdom?

Maybe not, looking at our world, and even more importantly into our own hearts, humans, us, put a lot of energy into being:

- Powerful
- Rich
- Popular
- In control
- Right

Hmmm.....so before we can genuinely listen to Wisdom, we might do well to look inward, and at least own if not confess our tendencies to yearn for sexier qualities than wisdom.

The first three--powerful, rich and popular-- remind me a little of the characters in the old TV show Dynasty, though none of us is immune from a bit of them.

But ohhh, those last two; no matter our age, no matter our life circumstances, we SO often want to be in control and right.

Wisdom, truth be told, might be pretty far down on our lists.

But as life increases in complexity and pain,

- Powerful
- Rich
- Popular
- In control
- Right

may start to lose their power, and we might yearn for that which lasts, yes, wisdom, and yes, for the living bread that Jesus speaks of in our gospel lesson.

When we loose our grip on the seductions of the world, our hearts, like the prodigal, yearn again for home, for our God, for the bread, and there we may find Wisdom.

Wisdom is shown in our reading to prepare a place, her home, and a meal to offer that yes includes bread and wine, to those ready to hear her invitation.

Eugene Peterson's The Message interpretation of the Bible enlivens the invitation that Wisdom offers in the streets, in the world:

*Lady Wisdom goes to town, stands in a prominent place,
and invites everyone within sound of her voice:*

"Are you confused about life, don't know what's going on?

Come with me, oh come, have dinner with me!

*I've prepared a wonderful spread—fresh-baked bread,
roast lamb, carefully selected wines.*

Leave your impoverished confusion and live!

Walk up the street to a life with meaning.”

Walk up the street to a life of meaning. Wisdom does not offer platitudes, she opens the door, we are invited to live with meaning.

And there it is, the that thread connects to our brother Jesus; a life of meaning:

Feed the hungry

Give water to the thirsty

Welcome the stranger

Clothe the shivering

Care for the sick

Visit the imprisoned

This past week I attended an on-line conference. Bishop Jennifer had recommended it to the Deans, and I signed up. The conference was called the Global Leadership Summit, and featured speakers from all over the world.

One speaker stood out for me, a man named Shola Richards. He spoke on civility in the workplace, which sounds obvious, but is sadly lacking in so many places, including the church.

Richards went on to emphasize that we are defined by how we treat others. The civility, the respect we show to our fellow humans is not a side piece in our lives, rather it defines us.

In our faith, that translates into seeing Christ in everyone we meet, in respecting the dignity of every human being.

I have been invited back to Grace Church this month to preach at two funerals. And in September Tim and I will be preaching at an old neighbor's funeral. As I have pondered those homilies, the words from that conference have come back to me:

We are DEFINED by how we treat each other.

AND, the speaker went on to note,

We will be remembered for HOW we treated others.

Power

Popularity

Being in control

Being right

Or how we treat one other.

Wisdom invites us to her house.

Jesus offers himself as the bread of life.

*“Leave your impoverished confusion and live!
Walk up the street to a life with meaning.”*

Amen.

