

## **Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost August 15, 2021**

### **Proverbs 9:1-6, Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6:51-58**

I remember in my college years getting sticker shock that first week of school. Within two days you received 5-6 syllabi (in those days they were often one sheet, maybe two) that had everything you were going to do in that semester on them. It could be overwhelming until you took a breath and remembered, I have 3 ½ months to do this!

Now, since you have the syllabi and this prior knowledge of projects and papers that are due at the end of the semester, it would be wise to work on them a little bit all along the way. Right? How often did that happen? Not much, but I remember that after a particularly hectic end to the semester one year, my Junior year I think, I swore I would do that for the next term. And I did. I think it was a theatre paper, where I did an hour or two of research or writing each Saturday throughout the semester. By the end of the term my paper was done, and I avoided the panic and rush of my classmates. My quality of life at the end of term was so much better, less stress and fewer late nights.

The next semester, I was back to my normal habits, putting things off because there were more enjoyable things to do, I had plenty of time, etc. The wisdom of the previous semester had escaped me, somehow, and I engaged in what could be called foolishness.

Wisdom in the ancient world, including in the Hebrew scriptures, was personified in the feminine, Lady Wisdom- Sophia in the Greek. Wisdom was associated with intelligence, discernment, the ability to take in information and make decisions

that turned out well. Wisdom within the Hebrew context associated with God's commands. Follow God's commands and you walk in the way of insight and understanding. Follow God's commands and you will be wise.

This connection between God's commands and wisdom is the basis for Paul's comments in his letters to the Corinthians that the wisdom of God seems like foolishness to the world. God's wisdom is so different from our conception of wisdom because God is so different from us.

I really hadn't fully understood that in some ways until this week. How self-centered, human centered we really are. Why do we think our definitions should reign? That what we believe is just, or equal, or true should be the case? Especially when we know doggone well that we are so often not wise? How many of you worked on your papers a little bit all semester? The idea that we can discern on our own what is wise and good is why we get into trouble. It begins with Adam and Eve- They are in the garden, filled with abundance to choose from and chose the one thing forbidden to them. Why? They believe their judgment was better than God's. That they knew better than God what would lead to life fuller and more abundant. Look where it got them.

The same is true with the Hebrews in Jesus' time. "Our ancestors ate the only bread that matters, they say, manna, physical bread. What do you have that is so much better than that? Yourself?" They are blinded by their own foolishness and cannot see the wisdom of God, as Paul calls Jesus in 1 Corinthians. They cannot see that Jesus is the embodiment of true wisdom. Of God's wisdom.

The Wisdom of God sounds foolish to us, too. Listen to Jesus; love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. Turn the other cheek, see everyone as created

in the image of God and act that way. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless whether you believe they deserve it or not.

The goal of the Wisdom of God is life- life fuller and more abundant- life for the whole world. In some small way, that's what I had for one brief moment in time that semester. A taste of what life could be like if I followed something other than my own perception of what was wise. If I trusted that voice outside of myself, even if it did come in the form of my professor giving us advice on that first day of class.

If you look at how wisdom is described in Proverbs- insight- understanding- complexity- and how it is described by Paul in Ephesians- being able to put things together- like puzzle pieces, to understand and see what the will of God is- wisdom is about acknowledging the complexity of things, of looking deeper. Wisdom is trusting that Jesus, the Son of God, sees the world better than we do.

But it is hard, because most everything Jesus talks about seems not wise, but foolish. And, in the eyes of the world it is foolish. One continuing education event I attended talked about the components that make up society. Things like family, civic organizations, sports, religion, government, etc. The relative value placed on these things was expressed by the size of the circle. Almost 75 years ago now, in the 1950's, church participation was rewarded in society. Along with participation in civic organizations. If you wanted to be successful in society, you participated in those two things. Now, participation in church is well below things like participation in sports. This explains why there are more travelling sports teams and games and practices scheduled on Sunday mornings.

The wisdom of the world says, spend your time, energy, and effort on these things and you will guarantee or improve the chances that your child will be successful. They will get into the good school, get wonderful social skills, learn how to deal with adversity and overcome it. Gain social standing. And that is true. It will do those things. But the wisdom of God says something different.

The wisdom of God says that being surrounded by the Word of God read to you, sung by you, taught to you, breathed in by your every breath and chewed on like your puppy gnawing your favorite slippers- that placing that first will give you life fuller and more abundant. That practicing confessing where you have done wrong, practicing loving others who you might otherwise be inclined to hate, practicing receiving forgiveness and unconditional love will make you more fully into who you are created and called to be than anything else. The wisdom of God says this is the priority and everything else is secondary.

The wisdom of God seems like foolishness to the world, and it is, as far as that goes. But the wisdom of the world ends at the grave. The wisdom of the world is corrupted by the same “stinkin’ thinkin’” that led Adam and Eve to eat of the one tree they couldn’t touch because to do so would mean they die. The wisdom of the world is foolishness because it says that we know what’s best. And that is demonstrably false.

Friends, I include myself in this, turn from foolishness. For it only leads to death in the end. This world leads us to hate other human beings created in the image of God because of their beliefs, or skin color, or where they were born. This world delights in the downfall of another. This world looks out for our own and the hell with everyone else. This world is about power, coercion, force.

Friends, turn to the wisdom of God. Love that fills us to overflowing. Joy that is anchored so much deeper than mere happiness. Peace that no storm can rock. Compassion that touches others with God's own love. Wisdom to discern the image of God in others. Wisdom to love them for that image. Practice that. Perfect that. And you will have life- fuller and more abundant than anything else this world can offer. And in the end, eternal life, with Christ and all those caught up in God's foolish wisdom. I pray that for you. And for me.