



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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September 3, 2006

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Proverbs 9:1-6

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1

Second Lesson: Ephesians 5:15-20

Gospel: John 6:51-58

Come to Wisdom's Banquet

Take a moment and think about what is the most valuable thing that you possess. What is the most valuable thing that you own? If you are a kid, is it your video game system? Is it your house? Is it your car? Is it your health? Is it your children? What answer did you come up with? I would guess that because you are sitting in a church and you are thinking this is "church stuff" you might have tied your answer in with God somehow. At least I hope some of you did. But what I think would be really interesting is if someone came up to you and asked you that question on Wednesday afternoon. Would you still come up with a "God" answer for that person? Or would you worry that they are going to try to rip you off when you tell them what the most valuable thing you have is?

The most valuable thing we have is the knowledge of what true wisdom is—to use the words of Proverbs that we are looking at. True wisdom is the knowledge that even though we are sinners and we deserve to go to hell, God sent his one and only Son into the world who lived in our place under the law and kept it perfectly. Then God himself died in our place to take away all of our sins. This knowledge that lives in our heart by faith is the most important thing that we have. It is true wisdom. It is the essence of what makes us Christians. If everything else was lost but we still had that, we would still have everything.

I don't know if that is immediately what you thought of, but as we hear wisdom personified and we are invited to come to wisdom's banquet, hopefully we hear these words from Proverbs and we come to that conclusion as we leave today. As we consider this invitation to wisdom's banquet, we see that everything has been prepared. There is nothing we have to do. There is nothing that we have to achieve. There is nothing that we have to earn. There is nothing that we have to deserve. Everything has been prepared. But also we are reminded that everything is at stake. This banquet isn't just beef or chicken. This banquet determines everything for us.

I don't know how familiar you are with the Book of Proverbs. There are a lot of sayings or proverbs that can be applied into daily life. It's not really a cohesive book that moves from one topic to the next as such except in the first nine chapters of the book. The first nine chapters of the book—it begins in Chapter 1 by saying *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge* (Proverbs 1:7). In Chapter 9, right after what I read to you a few minutes ago, it says *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding"* (Proverbs 9:10). In those first nine chapters, it talks a lot about wisdom and where true wisdom is found and why true wisdom is important.

We are at the end of this whole discussion on wisdom that Solomon was inspired to write for us and really only half of it is before you in Proverbs 9:1-6. If you were to open up your Bibles in your pew and take a look at the rest of the chapter, you would see the exact flip side. Folly or unwise—as Paul talked about it in Ephesians or as John recorded Jesus’ words for us—those that don’t eat the bread of life. This is personified as folly. It says, *The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave* (Proverbs 9:13-18). It is a complete contrast between wisdom and folly. Where are you going to spend your life and what banquet are you going to eat at—wisdom or folly? Are you going to follow the way that seems to make the most sense to you or are you going to follow what true wisdom is? There is a great struggle at times in our lives with wisdom and folly. We might not call it such, but that is really what is going on.

True wisdom is found in knowing God and knowing him more and more and knowing everything he has done for us. Sometimes we are convinced that true wisdom is found in some other place—chasing after the things of this world, chasing after the things that appear to be sweet, appear to be food eaten in secret that is delicious, possessions, pleasures. We chase after them and chase after them and we say there will be a time when we can get back to that “God stuff” but right now this is what is important. Sometimes we walk right by the completely prepared feast that God has for us of wisdom and forgiveness and new life in Christ, and we walk into the devil’s arms because we think it is going to be more fun to chase after “other stuff”—things that folly says is good. It is going to be a lot more fun to have an affair than to just spend time with your wife or with your husband. It is going to be a lot more fun running around sitting at the bar all night than it is spending time with your children. It is going to be a lot more fun chasing after possessions, but then once you get the possessions, what do you have to do with them? Then you have to use them. You can’t just get that cottage and not use it. You have to use it. So what if it takes you away from God. You put your money into it. Pretty soon you chase after folly long enough and you forget what that stuff was you were going to get back to—that “God stuff.” You don’t have time and you have too much other stuff to do. We get so busy doing things ourselves, we forget the most important thing in our life is not what we do, but it is what God has done for us.

What God has done for us is prepare the meat, mixed the wine, set the table, sent out the messengers, had the messengers speak to our hearts, “Come to the banquet of wisdom.” This banquet is the knowledge that no matter what happens in this world, no matter what we have or what we don’t have, we have a God who loves us and has taken away our sins. We have a purpose in this life that goes beyond amassing of possessions. It goes to service to God—thanking God that he has lived and died in our place and taken away our sins. Here is true wisdom. But you know how it is. Sometimes it just takes us awhile to figure that out.

I remember when I was a teenager and my dad told me year after year, “You are going to think I am pretty dumb, but you are going to find out later that I am not as dumb as you think I am.” I remember thinking that I would never think that, but sure enough, as I went through my teenage years, all of a sudden dad didn’t know anything. He just didn’t understand how things are different and all this other stuff. Then all of a sudden I get to twenty-something-or-other and I realize that dad wasn’t that foolish. He knew what he was talking about. I just didn’t listen.

Hopefully we get to that point where we realize that God knows what he is talking about. The most important thing I have in this world is my faith in Jesus Christ. Hopefully it doesn’t come to us when we lose a loved one suddenly and we don’t know whether or not they believed in Jesus and then we have to stop and reexamine our life and say, “What is truly important?” Hopefully it doesn’t have to wait until we get some terrible news from a doctor and it shakes us to our very core and we say, “I better find some ‘God stuff’.” “I better eat at that banquet that has been completely prepared for me, because I can’t face it on my own.”

We think we are invincible. We think stuff will never touch us, but stuff does. Things happen. Whether good things or bad things happen to us, the most important thing that we can have at our side is the knowledge that God has taken away our sins in Christ and we have a purpose for life. We have a Savior who loves us no matter what we face—a Savior who is calling to us because we are simple and easily deceived, a Savior who wants us by his side so that we can face whatever this world throws at us because he realizes what is at stake is everything. *Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding* (Proverbs 9:6). If you follow the way of folly, *little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave* (Proverbs 9:18).

Everything is at stake—eternal life or eternal death. God has done it all. It is not something that we do, but we need to realize the most important thing that we can have is this wisdom that Christ has taken away our sins. God loves us eternally. If we just keep pushing things off until later, we are playing Russian roulette, not just with one bullet but with a lot of bullets in the revolver. Everything is at stake.

In Christ, in love for Christ, in knowledge that God has loved us and set us free from sin, we find joy in everything in our daily life, not just the circumstances that would normally make us joyful, but we find a joy that is beyond our outward circumstances. That is the wisdom that God is going to spend the whole Scriptures talking about. *Blessed is the man* (Psalm 1:1) whose *delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night* (Psalm 1:2). The blessings that he is talking about are finding joy and happiness in spite of our outward circumstances.

We can go through life like trees planted by streams of water, or we can go through life with roots that are in the dust. It depends on how much time we spend with our Lord and Savior. God has done it all. He invites us to the banquet and he says, “Eat and drink because my love for you is eternal.”