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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Pentecost 13

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, in our reading today from Proverbs 9, the figure of Wisdom is equated with bread.

Indeed the text says that Lady Wisdom calls out from within the town, saying, "Turn in here! Turn into my house. Come, and eat of my bread."

Yes, the figure of Wisdom is equated with of all things bread.

And, if we didn't know, bread in many-a-culture is a staple, a necessity, an essential, as much as the air we breathe, or the sleep we get.

Bread is a staple, an essential, a necessity.

And no doubt, the author of Proverbs equates Lady Wisdom with bread, so as to say that Wisdom is just as much a staple of life.

Wisdom is essential. It is a necessity.

Lady Wisdom says, "Put immaturity aside, and live, and walk in the way of insight, in the way of wisdom."

"Walk in the way of wisdom," says Lady Wisdom.

That is the message of our text from Proverbs today.

PAUSE

And then...and then, we get our Gospel reading, where once more we hear about Jesus, who says, "I am the living bread."

We have heard an awful lot about Jesus as bread these past several weeks.

And Jesus then is also a staple of life—an essential, a necessity.

Yes, we have heard a lot about Jesus as bread.

And today is no different, except we have this interesting connection between the Gospel reading and the reading from Proverbs.

Wisdom is equated with bread, in Proverbs 9.

Jesus equates himself with bread, in John 6.

Both Wisdom and Jesus are staples, the necessities of life.

PAUSE

We may make a further comparison between Wisdom and Jesus.

For the author of Proverbs says, Lady Wisdom was there at the beginning of Creation.

Proverbs 8:22 states, “The Lord created me.” This is Lady Wisdom speaking.

“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...”

Wisdom was there at the beginning of Creation.

Similarly, Jesus was there at the beginning of Creation.

John 1 says, “In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

And so in addition to Wisdom and Jesus both being associated with bread, there is this further comparison, where Jesus and the figure of Wisdom are said to have been there at the dawn of Creation.

PAUSE

And it is the apostle Paul in fact, who may have been the first to make the connection between the Old Testament notion of Wisdom, as it appears in Proverbs and elsewhere in the OT...

It may have been Paul who first associated the figure of Wisdom with Jesus.

In the first chapter of his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul refers to Jesus as the “wisdom of God.”

Yes, Jesus and the figure of Wisdom share then a close affiliation.

PAUSE

Now, when we think of wisdom, especially wisdom as understood in the Old Testament of the Bible, we are to think of wisdom as sort of the scaffolding undergirding all of creation.

The author of Proverbs says as much: “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.”

Yes, Wisdom is the scaffolding undergirding all of creation.

We can liken Wisdom then to the steel skeleton of some multi-level building, a skyscraper, if you will.

Yes, picture in your mind the steel skeleton of a skyscraper—

Think of the Burg Khalifa, located in the United Arab Emirates, the world’s tallest building at 2,717 feet.

Or think of the Taipei 101 building, located in Taiwan, rising to a height of 1,617 feet.

Closer to home we can think of the Sears Tower in Chicago at 1,451 feet.

Or the Empire State Building at 1,250 feet.

Think of the steel skeleton that undergirds any tall skyscraper.

Or think of the wood frame of a house that is being built.

Think of those skeletons and we get the picture of what our ancestors of the faith envisioned, when they spoke of “Wisdom” in the Old Testament, and “Jesus” in the New Testament, as the foundation (the scaffolding) of the world.

Again, Lady Wisdom says, “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...”

And again from the Gospel writer John: “All things came into being through the Word (Jesus), and without him not one thing came into being.”

Wisdom is the scaffolding undergirding all of Creation.

Jesus is the scaffolding undergirding all of Creation.

PAUSE

And so, this is what our forebears of the faith are also wont to say WITH RESPECT TO Jesus and Wisdom AND our human lives.

Wisdom tells us to eat of her bread.

Jesus says we are to eat him who is the living bread.

In essence, the message is that Wisdom/Jesus is the scaffolding undergirding not just Creation, but our very lives.

How do we build up our lives?

How do we give shape and structure to our lives?

What does it mean to construct a life that gives glory to God?

Thinking again of a skyscraper. Thinking of a skyscraper...should captivate our imagination...

What does it mean to construct a life like that—that inspires like a skyscraper—a life that gives glory to God?

It means, we eat the bread of Wisdom. It means, we eat that bread that is Christ.

And, what I mean by this, what the Bible I believe means by this, is that our lives should be lived according to Wisdom, according to the teaching of Jesus.

Now, our ancestors in the time of the Old Testament understood Wisdom as that which can be learned from OBSERVING the world.

One could look at the world and see how one is to live one's life, because Wisdom is right there for the taking.

So, consider the little teachings that have been pass along to us.

When we come to a street, what are we to do?

Look both ways before crossing it.

Why? Why have we been taught this? Because it had been OBSERVED in the past that when an individual crossed a street without looking both ways, that individual suffered injury or worse—the result of colliding with a car driving by.

Most proverbs, most sayings, originate from this kind of observation.

For, instance, there is the saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

Which of course means, you can’t judge something or someone just by their outward appearance.

How many times have we done that and have been disappointed?

On the other hand, racial justice would come along way if we as a society would be more keen to remember that proverb.

PAUSE

Or what about the saying, “Take the log out of your own eye, before removing the splinter from your neighbor’s eye.”

In other words, don’t go around judging others when we ourselves have cause to be judged.

PAUSE

Or one of my most favorite sayings is “Fortune favors the bold,” attributed to a 2nd century B.C. playwright of the name Terence.

The meaning of that saying is that those who are brave and take risks tend to be more successful in life. “Fortune favors the bold.”

PAUSE

So, yes, we have all sorts of proverbs and sayings, pieces of wisdom, that have emerged over time, which have emerged because of what someone OBSERVED and then captured in a saying.

Look both ways before you cross the street.

Take the log out of your own eye, before removing the splinter from your neighbor’s eye.

Fortune favors the bold.

So on and so forth.

Wisdom does indeed undergird all of Creation.

We just have to be observant enough to see it, and then to live by it, or to eat of Wisdom's bread, as our text phrases it.

PAUSE

But, what of the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ?

What does it mean to eat the living bread?

What does it mean to tap into the wisdom of Jesus who undergirds all of Creation?

Well, if we return to Paul and to his first chapter in First Corinthians, we find what is the wisdom of God, which is nothing else than the cross of Christ.

Paul says, "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Paul goes on, saying, and I am paraphrasing here.

Paul says, "We proclaim Christ crucified. We proclaim the cross, which is the very power of God and the very wisdom of God."

The cross seems but foolishness. It doesn't make any sense that a cross—a means of execution—is God's wisdom.

But this, this cross of Christ, is that which undergirds all of Creation.

The cross is God's mercy, it is God's compassion.

The cross is God's sign of forgiveness, and it is God's promise of redemption.

The cross is abundant life and the revelation of God's love.

And, I find it quite helpful that when we imagine the steel skeleton of skyscrapers, or the wooden frames of houses...what do we see but horizontal lines crisscrossing with vertical lines.

In other words, there is the image of the cross repeated over and over again in the framework of a building, which is a powerful reminder of the hidden cross of Christ undergirding all of Creation.

Yes, God built up this world by the means of grace — mercy, forgiveness, redemption, love.

And when we learn from Christ to be merciful, and compassionate, forgiving, and loving...

When we learn to embody Christ, when we eat of this living bread of heaven, such that the cross becomes a staple for us...when we do that, we are truly being built up into one awe-inspiring edifice as glorious as any skyscraper.

That is who we are becoming by eating the bread of Christ...

That is how we are being built up by taking in and then sharing the grace of God in Christ.

We as followers of Christ are rising, towering, looming large like any skyscraper, maybe not to such heights as thousands of feet.

But whether we be 4 foot eleven, 5 foot eight, or 6 foot two...

Whatever our height, we can inspire others by revealing the love of Christ that makes up our structural being, that undergirds who we are as followers of Christ.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.