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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, in the ancient world, at the time of Jesus and even well before, there was a category of literature called wisdom literature.

It was not called as such then. The designation “wisdom literature” came later when modern Biblical scholars analyzed and scrutinized the ancient Biblical texts.

And part of the analysis is something called literary criticism, which is in part focused on the classification of texts, so as to assign them to particular genres, or types of literature.

So, for instance, some literature in the Bible can be classified as myths, some as fables, other as history, and still others as prophetic.

And then there is literature in the Bible that is categorized as wisdom literature.

This would include the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job.

Now, biblical scholars talk about wisdom literature as influenced and deriving from wisdom theology.

And wisdom theology is based on the idea that we as individuals can understand the how God works, how God functions by observing the world all around us.

If you do bad, you see you will receive bad in return. If you do good, you see you will receive good in return.

This is what the ancients subscribed to—that you can see how God works in the world by observing the happenings in the world around us.

And so in short, we as individuals can in fact live a long, and good, and prosperous life if we are cognizant, if we are aware, of the workings of everyday life.

So for instance, it is not wise for us to run carelessly, heedlessly out into the street.

Because we might be hit by a car.

And so, we have a piece of wisdom that we tell children, don't we?

We have a piece of wisdom we have learned early on in life.

"Look both ways, before crossing the street."

This modern day wisdom saying came into being no doubt because someone once observed in everyday life, someone once observed an individual who did carelessly, heedlessly run out into the street without looking both ways, and the result was not good.

Yes, wisdom theology is about observing the happenings in the world around us so that we might learn to live a long, and good, and prosperous life.

And wisdom literature records all that wisdom collected over time that has been observed in everyday life.

But the key, THE KEY is to be observant.

PAUSE

Now, today, we have a piece of wisdom from the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

In our first reading, we are told, "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great."

And what is this, but a wisdom teaching about humility.

More specifically, it is a teaching about KNOWING YOUR PLACE.

And again it is obvious how this saying came into being.

Someone somewhere down the line, decided probably without thinking to sit in a place of honor at table.

And it so happened that that individual was told that that seat was not theirs and so then that individual was directed to a lower seat.

They were directed to a lower place not doubt with a great deal of embarrassment.

And so wisdom was conceived.

And so the Proverb says, "It is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble."

And this teaching is now part of our wisdom literature.

This teaching had derived from wisdom theology, it derived from observing the world, from observing the happenings in everyday life, so then to discern what would lead to a good, and prosperous, and honorable life.

PAUSE

Now this is all well and good, but is this the entirety of our message this morning? Don't take a seat of honor.

Indeed, we hear the same message in our gospel passage this morning, but there must be something more to it than "Don't take in the seat of honor when at a social engagement."

Seems simple enough. Got the message. Moving on, right?

Indeed Jesus all but quotes Proverbs 25:6-7 in our reading from Luke.

But there must be more to it than that.

There must be something more.

So let's break it down for moment.

Here in this gospel passage Jesus is at the house of a leader of the Pharisees.

And notice Jesus is observing, is keeping close watch of the other guests.

Jesus is observing the happenings of everyday life around him.

Sounds like wisdom theology at work, doesn't it?

And Jesus notices that all the guests are taking the places of honor.

And so Jesus effectively quotes Proverbs 25:6-7 to everyone.

Probably not a way to endear one's self, but nevertheless, Jesus points out their fault.

But the gospel writer Luke here is certainly doing something here with this scene.

Luke is all but certainly thinking beyond this mere earthly context.

No, Luke is probably, is all but assuredly, equating the heavenly banquet to this wedding banquet.

Luke is likely juxtaposing, comparing, here the ways of the world with respect to the ways of heaven.

And the admonition emerges again loud and clear, "Know your place."

And knowing OUR place is always based on the example of Christ Jesus.

PAUSE

When God came to earth in the person of Jesus, God came NOT in splendor like a king, like a monarch, not like royalty with unbridled fanfare.

No, God in Jesus Christ was born in manger among dirty, smelly animals.

God did not exalt himself in Jesus Christ, but humbled himself when he came to earth.

And when God in his Son Jesus Christ ministered in this world, God did lord it over other people.

God in Jesus Christ did not elevate himself in grandeur, did not wield his power to dominate.

No, God in Jesus Christ walked among lepers and prostitutes, and sinners.

Jesus socialized with the unclean, the outcasts, the nobodies of society.

And when God in his Son Jesus Christ died, he did not receive honor and pomp and circumstance.

His death was not regarded with any sign of dignity or distinction.

No, he was despised. He was mocked. He was tortured and he was nailed to a cross.

In other words, sisters and brothers in Christ, in other words our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ always took the lowest place.

And as a result, God called to him, saying, "Friend, move up higher."

God called to his Son Jesus and said, “Be raised.”

“Be made alive and move up to a higher place.”

“Be made alive and be now exalted.”

This, Friends, THIS is the message of our gospel reading for today.

This is what Luke the gospel writer is certainly alluding to.

Luke is alluding to this fact when he writes, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble, like Christ did at his birth, during his ministry, at his death...all those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Yes, Luke is alluding to the greatest of examples, that of our God the Creator of the whole universe who humbled himself as to be become human, and who humbled himself so as to become a servant, and who humbled himself so as to die, even suffering death on a cross for us...

Luke is alluding to the great example of our God who humbled himself and was subsequently exalted.

Luke in this gospel passage is alluding to the fact that our Lord Jesus knew this important piece of wisdom, knew this all-important maxim—KNOW YOUR PLACE.

And that THAT was Jesus’ place. (POINT TO THE CROSS)

It is not an enviable place. None of us envies Jesus, envies his destiny, his fate.

None of us would want to go to that place where our Lord suffered and died.

None of us desires that place.

PAUSE

But, in truth, God does call us to similar places of humility.

God calls us to go to the lower place. God wants us to KNOW OUR PLACE.

This is what Jesus means when he says, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”

Are we to literally invite such persons over for lunch or dinner? Perhaps.

But more specifically, this is a metaphor.

It a metaphor that we are to KNOW OUR PLACE, where we go to serve among the most vulnerable in our world.

We seek out the place where there is need, where there is suffering.

We seek out the place of longing, of despair, of hopelessness.

We seek out that place because in our meeting with the most vulnerable is where we find God, it is the place where we learn God's will, it is the place where we learn what life really is all about—and it is not about the world's definition of honor, greatness, or prestige.

But instead, it is about service and humility and sacrifice.

But to do this, and do this well we have to be observant, we have to see the happenings in everyday life, we have to be keen to watch for it.

And when we see it to go toward it, to embrace it.

Where someone is lonely...Where someone is grieving...Where someone is ailing and infirmed...Where someone is lost and afraid...Where someone is hungry for food, hungry for friendship, hungry for hope...

That is our place.

Jesus says, "Know your place."

Don't take the place of honor.

Don't take the most coveted seat.

Don't take the chair at the head of the table.

Humble yourself, as God humbled himself.

Observe, look around you, see where you are being called to serve and to give of yourself, to the most lowly around us.

And then, then you will be exalted. This is the great wisdom of world.

The cross is God's great wisdom.

But it is a wisdom many in the world still do not understand, or choose not to understand, or simply do not know.

The cross is profound wisdom. It is God's destined place. And how the world comes to know this wisdom for themselves is by our example.

For if we want to truly know God, if we truly want to experience the gospel of God ourselves, we, like our Lord Jesus, we will go to the place where there is suffering in our world.

And there we will ally ourselves, there we will align ourselves, there we will join ranks with, there we will accompany the downtrodden.

And there we will lift up our neighbors, and at the same time be lifted up ourselves.

This is how God works in the world. And this is what the world needs to see for themselves to know true wisdom.

Go, sit down at the lowest place, and behold what happens when the host, when our God comes.

Thanks be to God. Amen.