

Rev. Lynne Ogren
August 19, 2018

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
13th Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

Let us pray. Grant us, O God, to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your word, and in loving your word to do your will through Christ our Lord. Amen

Wisdom is a theme that threads through all of our readings today. On Friday I went to Billings with some of our women to visit the ladies who have moved to St. John's Lutheran Ministry. As I looked around the table I saw the wisdom of those who have worked and served and endured all that life dishes out, and they have faced it all surrounded by the people and relationships of this congregation.

I asked them to share some of their memories. They didn't talk about lutefisk dinners or quilting or any of the things they had done. They said it was the people they remember. They talked about the time when they were the younger women and how every year they would invite the older women to their circle's Christmas party. Now they are the elders, and they would love to be the ones who are invited.

Yesterday, I officiated a wedding of a young couple, both still in their 20's. In the homily I gave them some words of wisdom from couples who had been married a long time. My favorite piece of advice for a strong marriage was, "Never hang wallpaper together!"

The voice of Wisdom, the wisdom that comes from God, comes to us in a variety of ways. There are public voices we pay attention to. There are the voices of our elders who have lived life and have learned things they want to share with others. And sometimes Wisdom comes to us through the voices of our children.

There is a video that has been shared around the internet of a young girl, maybe 4 or 5 years old, talking to her mother who is apparently going through a divorce with the girl's father. The little girl says, "Mom, I want you and Dad to keep things low." And she uses her hands to show that. "Keep things low, calm. Don't get loud and mad with each other. I want you to like each other. I want us all to get along. I want you and Daddy to get along."

Aside from being annoyed that a mother would take the time to video record her child in this most precious and important moment, this child has been a voice of wisdom for a world where adults spend much of their energy trying to be higher than one another. "Be low. Be calm." This is a message the world needs to hear right now.

Wisdom and understanding go hand in hand. They are connected and yet different. The book of proverbs spends the first nine chapters providing advice, especially from a parent to a child. Words of wisdom are meant to help the next person or generation to learn from the struggles and mistakes of those who have gone before us. Sometimes we learn from these words and avoid similar pitfalls in life. And sometimes those words only hold meaning when we stumble and fall and learn that wisdom the hard way.

Understanding is a different kind of knowledge. It comes through relationship. Understanding is to see things from another perspective, to step out of ourselves and learn what life is like for another or learn how we are changed and impacted by the life of others. This is the kind of relationship we are invited into, both by Woman Wisdom in Proverbs and by Jesus Christ. Perhaps we can even see the life and teachings of Jesus reflected in the earlier words of Wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

God has been at work over the ages to teach us God's wisdom that comes not from God's mistakes, but from God knowing us as our Creator. Sometimes we do learn from God. We follow one or more of the Ten Commandments. We follow the Proverbs and do our best to teach our children in the ways they should go so that they do not stray from that wisdom.

But just as often, if not more, we learn God's wisdom the hard way. We live for ourselves, going high as that little girl might say, competing, earning, striving for our own desires and our own ways of justice. And in our living—and failing and being redeemed by God—God's wisdom comes to life for us.

We cannot avoid all failures and struggles in life. That would be impossible. But we can come to a place in which the Wisdom of God is the guiding light to help us navigate this crazy world. That place is really a relationship, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He is the One who lived this human life and came to redeem it, to make it right, by giving his body and blood for it.

Jesus invites us into this relationship. Throughout John's gospel Jesus invites us to "Come and see!" In our gospel reading today he says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I [abide] in them." Jesus invites us to come to him to enter into his life, death, and resurrection. And he makes that invitation so that he can abide or enter into us, into our lives and relationships, into our joys and our struggles.

The letter to the Ephesians highlights one way that we can come to understand the wisdom and will of God. It says we are filled with the Holy Spirit as we sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs together. I am thankful for the hymn writers and song writers who, over the centuries, have given us another way to be in relationship with God. Our music often gives us a new way to hear and proclaim the truth and wisdom of God.

Even if you are not what you would consider to be musical, I invite you to look at the words of the songs and the liturgy as you prepare for worship, or after you go home. The hymns are chosen to reflect and reiterate the theme and messages of the scriptures of the day and season of the year. This coming year our confirmation youth will be asked to pay attention to the ways they hear the gospel, the Good News, in worship. Hopefully they will hear that in the sermon, but it might come from a hymn or a prayer or in the sharing of peace.

Our congregation, and all the other Christian gatherings around the world, is a place where the relationship Jesus invites us into is experienced and lived out. Listen to the voices of those around you as we sing, pray, and profess our faith together.

One of our members told me that their family used to always sit in the back when the kids were young so they could scoot out quickly if they needed to. But when the children were grown they moved to somewhere in the middle of the sanctuary, and she was amazed at how powerful it was to have voices behind her, singing, praying, whispering, and maybe sometimes even weeping softly.

I wonder what it would have been like for the kids in that family to have heard those voices all along. I can assure you that all the kids in that particular family are strong people of faith, so where we sit does not make or break our faith formation.

But, as you've heard from me before, we are looking at ways that we can encourage the building of relationships in this faith community so that the wisdom we learn from one another comes from a variety of perspectives and experiences. Maybe if you sit in a different place once in a while, you might meet someone whose voice in your ear becomes a new source to receive God's wisdom, or to share what you have learned and know about God with someone else.

Guided by the Spirit, let us sing together a reflection of our reading from Proverbs as we listen to the voices God has placed around us today.

Thanks be to God!