

August 16, 2015
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church
Proverbs 9:1-6, Ephesians

Wisdom

I have a smartphone. It's not a wise phone. Or perhaps I don't always use it wisely. Smartphone in my pocket, I've headed out for a bike ride under blackening skies—my phone says it's not going to rain for an hour, but I am swiftly soaked and my wet phone stops working. (Thank goodness for the rice treatment.) I've followed driving directions from my smartphone, directions which ultimately have me going the long way round, because instead of paying attention to road closed signs and warnings, I go the way my phone told me to go. I've asked my smartphone questions, you know how you can talk into iPhones and the feminine voice of Siri will respond, I'll ask her questions and get completely unrelated information—or general confusion: “I'm not sure what you're asking...” Sometimes Siri says that to me, just out of the blue. Suddenly she'll start talking to me, and she refers to me in a particular way: “I'm not sure what you're asking, Pastor.” I have no idea how my phone picked up my title. And to my ears, when she says it, it can sound like a taunt, “I'm not sure what you're asking, Pastor.” My phone has access to limitless amounts of information. She's incredibly smart. But she's not very wise.

Wisdom is a woman, in the Bible, wisdom is not a phone, but she is feminine. The original languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek, are both gendered languages, like Spanish and French are. In Biblical linguistics, objects and concepts are masculine or feminine. Now of course, that doesn't mean that in the Biblical imagination wisdom is exclusive to women, any more than every Spanish dog is male. But it does mean that the Greek word for wisdom—the word for wisdom used in the New Testament—has come to be used as a name for a girl: Sophia. The name Sophia is Greek for wisdom. (Note how many more girls there are named Sophia than Siri.) And it is also the case that in the Old Testament, not only is the word for wisdom feminine, but the very concept of wisdom is personified as a woman. We find that in the first reading today, in Proverbs chapter 9, wisdom is personified as a woman. There are actually a number of places in Proverbs where that female personification of wisdom occurs, many at greater length. You can read about Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1, and again in chapters 3 and 4, and just prior to today's reading in chapter 8, and then here in these first six verses of chapter 9, which were the first reading today.

In this excerpt today, Wisdom is a hostess, a mistress of a house. And, in fact, she has built that house herself. Wisdom was way ahead of the DIY movement. She knows what to do with a drill. She makes herself a house, and it is a fine house, with seven pillars. This is an impressive house, of substantial size and quality, a dwelling with a definite sense of history, of origins—the number of its pillars, seven, being perhaps a reference to the Biblical seven days of creation and Wisdom's part in creation, Wisdom being a part of what God is. Wisdom lives in the house she built, the dwelling place that she has created, and she has ample resources, animals and wine, which she uses to prepare a feast. She's the kind of hostess that makes all of the food herself, from scratch. Like God, at creation. The hostess of Proverbs even slaughters the animals that will be served. (My sister-in-law's mother is like that. My sister-in-law's mother makes vast batches of homemade granola, and customized slippers, with boiled wool from old sweaters, and at Thanksgiving time, she gets her Wisconsin hunting license and goes out and shoots a turkey, takes it home, plucks, prepares it, serves it.)

Proverb's Woman of Wisdom of is like that, imminently capable. She builds a house, and prepares a feast, and the point of it all is to welcome others into it, to welcome them into the

dwelling she has created and to share a meal there with them. Wisdom gets the place ready, sets the table, and then sends out invitations. Wisdom sends out her servant-girls (more women!) with the invitations. Now, to my ears, Wisdom's invitation can sound a bit like a taunt. In the words of Proverbs, she says, "You that are simple, turn here!" And then a little later, we read that this invitation is "for those without sense," to whom she says, "Come, eat of my bread!" So, it could be argued, there's a way in which that invitation doesn't seem all that invitational. In general, good hostesses do not insult the guests: "Hey, blockhead, come eat!"

And yet there is another sense in which this invitation is good, is very good, is invitational, is just what we need to hear. Wisdom's invitation is for the simple. It's for people who ride their bikes into the pouring rain. It's for people who take indirect paths from points A to B. It's for people who do not know how to use their phones. Maybe you can relate to that. Maybe you, too, have done things that are not very smart. Maybe sometimes you have headed straight into storms. Maybe you have taken the long way, the hard way, disregarding warning signs, to get where you are supposed to be. Maybe you are holding something, with all kinds of potential, but you don't know what to do with it. The good news of Proverbs is that wisdom is offered, to me, and to you. The creative, capable, hospitable wisdom of God is offered, not because we have it all down pat, but because we do things that make no sense.

Hear how wisdom is offered here, not according to a certain test score, not to just the top of the class or the head of the company. Wisdom is not allocated in that way. The good news of Proverbs, the good news of God's grace, is that wisdom is available for everyone, to everyone who listens for her call. No matter how you test or what you have, you can be wise. To sit at Wisdom's table, you need only have ears that will listen. You need only to respond, as God calls in the most loving way possible: "Hey blockhead, come eat." Actually, in the wording of the Proverbs, God's invitation almost sounds like driving directions: "You that are simple, Turn here!" The Wisdom of God, is calling to us, saying, "Quit looking at your phone." The Wisdom of God, is calling to us, "Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine." Wisdom is available to all, we only need listen and respond, listen and come to a house, built by wisdom, to a table. Take a place at the table, sit down and eat.

Sitting at a table together can do powerful things, can nurture a special kind of knowledge. Sociologists know this, as they study the importance of family meals, the incredibly high correlation there is in families that regularly eat together and children being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy—not to mention doing well in school. That holistic well-being, that's knowledge that's wisdom.

There's a special kind of knowledge, too, that comes not just when you sit at a table with your family, but when you sit at a table with your enemies. We are to share bread with our enemies, too. As psalm 23 reminds us, that's the table that God the Good Shepherd prepares: he prepares a table before us, in the presence of our enemies. When you sit together at a table, over a meal, with someone with whom you have been sharply at odds, you might see them differently. They might see you differently. There is wisdom that is offered, that comes there, too.

Wisdom is offered to us at God's table, here at Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper. We come to eat the bread and drink the wine, Christ's body and blood, Christ, as First Corinthians says, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Siri says, "I don't know what you're asking." We can be smarter than that. The Word of God says that to be wise is to know your lack, and know where to go to be filled. Come and eat!