

**Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58**  
**13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost B; 08.18.24; G. Miles Smith+**

I am very grateful for having had the opportunity for three weeks off... I am also grateful to The Rev. Marion Kanour for presiding and preaching those Sundays...and also our Staff who continued to take good care of you and all the many details of our community in Christ. Jennifer and I were able to celebrate the 99<sup>th</sup> birthday of her mother Dottie...and...the 1<sup>st</sup> birthday of our granddaughter Ruthie in North Carolina. I was able to rest, read, and do some writing and it was all good.

And so, this past week I've been back and catching up. And I'm already starting to feel the anticipation of a new Fall season here at Grace and all that is coming. We will start getting busier fairly quickly:

- our first ever after-church Picnic & Play on Lonesome Mountain will be next Sunday,
- the Holy Baptism of Whitney Taylor Locke will be on Labor Day Sunday, and
- then, beginning September 8<sup>th</sup>, we will return to the 9 and 11am service schedule and Holy Communion at the high altar.

And everything takes off from there. Before we know it, the rest of our new playground equipment will be here!... and it will be Thanksgiving Day and the Blessing of the Hounds!

This time of year in church reminds me of...going back to school after summer recess. And there is of course a direct connection with that today...with the blessing of backpacks for the children who are here today and getting ready to go back to school...and also the blessing of 10 backpacks which will be used in the food ministry that we continue to have for kids at Stony Point Elementary School.

I can remember being both excited *and* nervous about going back to school—there were lots of unknowns every year...but also friends and acquaintances to return to. And as much as I loved the free summer months...there was also something reassuring about the routines and patterns of school returning.

So, whether it is getting ready to go back to school...or getting ready for the new flow of church...there is a lot of change in the air. And it calls us all...to start paying attention again...and to get ready...*to get going*.

Both school and church do share something in common—they are both about *learning*...learning *new* things... being reminded of *old* things that we are supposed to have learned...and following a schedule. In both school and church we get a lot of experience in having relationships with other people. And in both we have the opportunity to gradually get to know ourselves better too. Sometimes all this can be quite invigorating...sometimes it is difficult...and it always takes some effort.

Perhaps we could say that *school* is supposed to help us get *smarter*...and *church* is supposed to help us get *wiser*? There is of course a lot to get smarter about in church too—the Bible stories...exercising our theological thinking...seeking how best to worship the way that we do...getting to know others better...and figuring out new challenges, problems, and opportunities that continuously arise in our community life together. *Getting smarter in church never ends for any of us—clergy included.*

But, I'm thinking that, primarily, church isn't about getting smarter...*but about getting wiser*. And, like getting smarter, the invitation to getting wiser never ends. *But it remains a question of whether or not we are answering the call to wisdom.*

So I wonder...*how wise you are feeling these days?*... But maybe that isn't the best way to put the question... because if we *could* say—"oh yes, I'm feeling pretty wise these days"—then chances are that's a pretty good sign that we *aren't so wise*. :) It is true that one of the signs of wisdom...is actually the self-awareness to recognize how much we are *not* wise...because so much of wisdom is having learned by our *mistakes*. That is why the older we get, the greater *possibility* there is that we are wiser. :)

Getting wiser *can* come with *experience*...and not only from our mistakes...but from our *successes*. Having memorable moments when we *said* something well...or *did* something well...is also part of wisdom. Our experience matters—and our memory of our experience—as we all seek to move forward.

*But there is also another side to wisdom that doesn't often get named.* There can also be a *dark wisdom*... that we can also learn by experience... People *can also* learn by their successes and failures...how to be more *effectively*...selfish. So, the wisdom that can come by *experience*...may not necessarily be *good wisdom*. *Somebody... has to teach us the difference.*

*The Bible does frequently call us to wisdom...and teaches us to desire good wisdom...so that when we learn from our experience...we are able to tell the difference between dark wisdom and good wisdom.*

In *Proverbs*, wisdom is personified...as being like a hostess...who has a great mansion...and having prepared a great meal...sends out invitations to all: “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.” Wisdom is imagined as a great feast for the soul...that gives life...and guides our lives...and challenges us to know when to set aside immature ways for better ways.

In the *Psalms*, while the word “wisdom” is not used, the idea of it is always assumed whenever the language of “the fear of the Lord” occurs. And in this Psalm it is clear that good wisdom is: Keeping our tongue from evil-speaking and our lips from lying words; turning from evil and doing good; seeking peace and pursuing it.

*Paul's letter to the Ephesians* says very clearly: “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise...so do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Evil days and damaging decisions can make us unwise. And so it is crucial that we return again and again to where we can experience the Holy Spirit that reveals what is good and true and commendable...by singing here together...giving thanks...and being in a fellowship together...that calls forth our better selves. (It may be hard to get to church sometimes and then we can be tired afterwards, but nevertheless we can somehow feel better—and part of that is having had the opportunity to meet our own better selves here...in the company of God and each other.)

And then, finally, recalling the *Gospel* reading today, there is an interesting parallelism that occurs between *Proverbs* and the words of Christ. Remember that wisdom in *Proverbs* is like a host who offers a feast for all of bread and wine...and then notice that in the *Gospel of John*...*Christ is the host who offers bread and wine*. The parallelism is clear: *Christ* is the One who can teach us wisdom...he is the Person of God who...*is*...good wisdom.

“This wisdom is the bread [...and wine] that came down from heaven.”

Christ invites us again today...to come to the feast of wisdom...to receive this wisdom... in our Communion...together.