

Sermon for Proper 15 Year B (BCP)
Church of the Ascension, Chicago
The Rev. Deacon Anna Broadbent
Proverbs 9:1-6 - Ephesians 5:15-20 - John 6:53-59

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, 'You that are simple, turn in here!' To those without sense she says, '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.' - Proverbs 9:1-6

"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise." - Ephesians 5:15

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. - John 6:53-59

The Kingdom of God is often pictured throughout scripture as God's people eating and drinking together with and we have a good example of this in our assigned text for today. In Proverbs we have a very beautiful passage of Lady Wisdom preparing for an enormous feast after building her house – she's slaughtered her animals, mixed her wine and prepared her table. She and her servant girls go out to the entire city and holler out to their community to "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed"¹ Her hospitality and generosity is almost to hysterical proportions – and yet – this is a picture of life-giving divine wisdom. If one wants to live and walk in the way of insight – this is the way to do it. Lady Wisdom's adversary throughout Proverbs is Lady Folly – while lady wisdom offers bread and wine to everyone – later in this chapter, Lady Folly offers stolen water and secret bread that is only available to the select few and the select few who choose Folly's feast do not receive the gift of life, rather eternity in Sheol - in hell.

The crafters of our lectionary continued this wisdom theme with their inclusion of the portion of the letter to the Ephesians. In v. 15 the people of Ephesus were cautioned "*Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise.*"² If we look earlier in the chapter the writer actually gives them the formula or hints of how to live a wise life which is to be imitators of Christ and to live as children of the light. I can't help but connect this to what it means to live and walk in the way of insight.

The Gospel of John – of which we have been reading from for the past few weeks and have another to go – carries many similarities of the wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible of which Proverbs is one. There is a cadence and style that can be poetic in nature that heralds back to Ecclesiastes or Job. In her book, *The Wisdom Jesus*, Cynthia Bourgeault suggests that Jesus is Wisdom "*the Word was with God, and the Word was God*"³ The Word is Wisdom. She

¹ Proverbs 6:5

² Ephesians 5:15

³ John 1:1

states that while uncommon in Western Christian culture – there is an occupation of wisdom teacher in Eastern traditions. These teachers were focused on the ancient traditions of transformation of the whole human being. She states that Wisdom Teachers tended to focus on the use of “pithy sayings, puzzles, and parables rather than prophetic pronouncements or divine decree. They spoke to people in the language that people spoke, the language of story rather than law”⁴ Does this sound like anyone we know? Bourgeault states that not only is Jesus the ultimate Wisdom Teacher, but that he is Wisdom Incarnate.

Have you spent time with someone that you would consider to be wise, or perhaps even a wisdom teacher in her or his own right? In my experience we know when are in the presence of wisdom – it is a palpable experience that I can feel to my very core. Somehow, I feel drawn into that person with pure curiosity and desire. I want to know what causes that person to radiate as a Child of the Light. I want to gather at their feet and soak up every word they are willing to share with me. Have you had this feeling? I think this is the type of wisdom that Fr. Dunkerley embodied in this world.

As many of you know, Fr. James Dunkerley, who was a dear friend and brother to this parish, died peacefully on Thursday morning. I didn’t get the chance to know Fr. Dunkerley as well as I would have liked, but I am already well blessed by his wisdom and his legacy. The day I met Fr. Dunkerley he asked me where I had completed my seminary studies, when I responded that I had attended Virginia Theological Seminary – He simply shook his head and said, “Well, we have a lot of work to do, don’t we?”

Fr. Dunkerley was very eager to share with me his wisdom and knowledge of this great Anglo-Catholic tradition that he loved so much. While I still have a lot of work to do, unfortunately it won’t be with Fr. Dunkerley, but I have no doubt that the imprints of his wisdom will be all around. On Thursday, after we learned of Fr. Dunkerley’s passing those of us present after our 12:10 Eucharist at the Cathedral began to swap stories about Fr. Dunkerley. The Rev. Lisa Hackney-James, sub-dean at the cathedral, recounted with tears running down her cheeks about what it was like to be mentored by Fr. Dunkerley as she prepared to deacon here at Fr. Patrick’s installation. She spoke with such love and compassion that her voice caught several times. Later that evening, Fr. Patrick spoke with such grace and gratitude as he shared with me about how Fr. Dunkerley supported him through his transition here.

Fr. Dunkerley’s love and wisdom is very much alive in this place and throughout the Diocese of Chicago. The last time I saw Fr. Dunkerley he asked me why he never saw me at the Cathedral’s Friday 12:10 service – at which he celebrated the Eucharist week in and week out. I shared with him that Fridays were my “off days” therefore I’m not usually around to which he responded – “Is that your excuse to miss Mass?” Fr. Dunkerley committed his life to Christ and to this Church. He was committed to growing in his own wisdom with Christ and sharing that with others.

We are about to participate in this great wisdom building sacrament of Holy Eucharist – during this act we are able to share a meal with one another as brothers and sisters, as children of the light and as imitators of Christ in this feast we are able join in the vast communion of saints throughout all generations that now include our brother, Fr. Dunkerley. May we all be open to allowing the wisdom of this meal to transform us from the inside out.

⁴ Bourgeault, C. (2008) *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind – A New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. Shambhala Publications Inc: Boston, MA. (pg 23).