

“When Wisdom Calls”
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Arlington Congregational Church, U.C.C.
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Proverbs 9:1-6

¹Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.

²She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table.

³She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town,

⁴“You that are simple, turn in here!”

To those without sense she says,

⁵“Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

⁶Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

I am very tempted to tell you that if I have to share with you MY wisdom this morning this will be a very short sermon. So I would rather turn to another source for whatever wisdom I might offer.

The passage this morning is from the wisdom of the Bible, from the Book of Proverbs. It tells us wisdom has built a house and is throwing a party and inviting anyone who would to come. Wisdom has a barbecue working, the bartender is mixing the punch, and the servers have put the chinette and plastic-ware on the folding tables in the backyard. She has all the sisters running out with the word to the unwise saying, “Come, eat and drink and set aside your self-assured ignorant immaturity and learn to live by walking in the way of insight.” Wisdom is calling, can you hear her?

This house of wisdom has seven pillars or columns that support it. I

want to share 7 columns that I believe support the wisdom of the Bible, and I believe, therefore the wisdom of God. If you are ready, I’ll get right to it, because fitting seven points into a three point sermon will take some wisdom and some fast talking.

The first pillar, I would suggest to you, is that whatever wisdom the Bible offers is free, but still must be earned. As parents we know that our children never appreciate our wisdom until they have children of their own. We can throw out all the best we have to offer and it is little more than “pearls before swine” as the saying goes. In that sense, wisdom is a lot like experience. Someone wiser than me once said, “Experience doesn’t necessarily guarantee learning. Some people have many experiences and learn from them. Some people keep having the same experience over and over because they never learn from it.” If your life is stuck in some way you

might want to think about that and whether or not you have learned what God needs you to learn from the particular experience you keep repeating.

The second pillar of wisdom that the Bible seems to reveal is maybe the most important. It is that God is at the center of all of life. We call our God Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. That pretty much sums up all of life, doesn't it? Is there any where God isn't? The Psalmist put it this way, "Where can I go, o God, that you are not there? If I go into the heavens or below the earth, if I go as far as east is from west, you are there."

Mick Walsh, our admin assistant Maria's son put it this way last week in the insert on our worship grant that we are doing: "The more you stretch God into every aspect of your life, the more complete you are as a Christian." I would suggest that we could stretch that to say, "the more complete you are as a human being." You see, God isn't just interested in Christians or in those who claim to be on his side. God is an equal opportunity wisdom sharer. I think in fact the best we can do if we claim to be Christians is to recognize that means we are trying our best to live by God's wisdom as opposed to our own. I might even say there really was only one REAL Christian and he was a Jew. The rest of us are just trying our best to live by his wisdom.

That brings me to my third pillar, that Christ was and is the fullest

expression of God's wisdom in human form. His life, his words, his being were the fullest expression of God's wisdom. To me that means that whoever Jesus was, they called him Christ because the more they knew about him, the more they reflected on what they experienced in him, the more they recognized him as the fullest expression of God and God's wisdom in the flesh.

For me this means that the wisest pathway in life is to strive to follow him. The truth is that by all measures I regularly, and too often intentionally, fail to follow him. But at my best I try my best to understand and apply the wisdom of God as I see it in Jesus Christ to my living. I believe that is the wisest way I can live. Sure there are alternatives out there, and many include great wisdom. But I believe there is more to wisdom than human intelligence and I believe the way of Jesus Christ integrates a spirituality, a connection with what I would call "beyond-human wisdom" of God that mere human wisdom cannot give me. To me that "wisdom" is a reality that is based beyond this life, beyond the physical and mental. I believe we glimpse it in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That promise is the promise of the fulfillment of the wisdom of God in Christ. I know this sounds pretty far out there, and we don't have time for me to fully flesh this out here and now, but I hope to just point you toward this

wisdom that I believe is found in Scripture.

The fourth pillar or column that I believe Scripture reveals is that life is about relationships – intentionally, fundamentally, and ideally. In other words, God means for us to put relationships first in our lives. I believe that when Christians use theology to exclude others from a relationship with God they fundamentally violate God’s purposes. God intends to be in relation with us and God does not put conditions on that. God teaches us his commandments and his wisdom so that we can better live in relationship, but God does not put theology before relationship.

When I say life is about relationships fundamentally, I mean that God not only intends for us to put relationships first, but that God created us to be in relationships. The very reason we exist is to be in relationships. Sin is denial of our connection to others and to God. That is why justice is so important to God. Injustice is a denial of relationship with others and with God. At its worst, injustice is committed when we deny that God loves the other person as much as God loves us. This is why I understand when liberation theology reads Scripture and proclaims God has a “preferential option FOR” the poor. They are saying that when we deny justice for the poor, the immigrant, the physically or mentally challenged, the

AIDS patient, or anyone who we have the power to deny justice for, we are denying that God loves them as much as us. Scripture could not be more plain that God “requires” us to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. To do otherwise is to deny our relationship with them and their relationship with God, and in the end it breaks our relationship with God.

Finally, life is relational ideally because that is where God intends to reveal his greatest blessing to us. The more fully we enter into relationships with others the more fully we experience life as God intends it. God mirrors this in what we call the “Trinity.” God is in relationship with God’s self in the expression we call Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This Holy Community is the ideal that God intends for us all to experience and is really the definition of heaven. I believe one way to envision heaven is to see it as the fulfillment of perfect relationships among all people and God.

This leads to the fifth column for our house of wisdom. Wisdom is found in compassionate sacrifice. Again, Jesus Christ embodies this in his life, death and resurrection. He called for his followers to live by an ethic of compassionate sacrifice. To live in relationship and to live as justly as possible requires a commitment to compassionate sacrifice. Whatever else we do with our lives, it seems to

me that God asks us to measure our lives by how well we were willing to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others in compassion. I think that God promises that in the sacrifice we will find our greatest joy, our greatest fulfillment, indeed the summit of life and wisdom. All of us probably battle the temptation to put other things ahead of this, or to avoid sacrifice and suffering at all costs, but it seems to me that if we do so we will miss the life that God intends us to experience and find the greatest blessing thereby.

The sixth column that builds a house of wisdom is forgiveness. All of us fail at these things. More than anyone, those of us who know God should be forgiving of those who don't know God in this way. We need to forgive them. We need to forgive ourselves. We need to forgive so that we can open the doorway to greater wisdom. Someone once said greater lessons are always learned through failure than through success. That suggest to that failure then becomes essential because it is the only way I will find greater wisdom. If wisdom is something attained on the journey, I cannot stop if I have failed. Forgiveness allows me to move forward and try to apply the lesson, the wisdom that the experience of failure teaches. If you think you are failure, take heart God loves us. If you think God cannot love you because you have failed in some way, take heart, God's love is certain. That is the message of

the Bible and the wisdom it reveals about God.

Finally, the seventh column of our house of wisdom is that while evil is real and dangerous, it will not win. No matter what else the Bible testifies to, it seems to me that it offers us the wisdom of knowing God has and will defeat evil. Evil seems to often have the upper hand. At the very beginning evil jumps in and tempts Adam and Eve to break relationship with God. The Israelites barely get established in the Promised Land before they start doing evil to each other. Jesus is crucified. Yet in every instance the Bible testifies that God overcomes evil. The ultimate pillar of wisdom for us to build our house with is the confidence that the evil around us and within us will perish. God will and has overcome evil. The cross and resurrection are the symbols of God's power and intention to do so. The wise person counts on this to be true.

So now that we have toured the seven pillars of our wisdom house, let's go out and join the party. The fatted calf is roasting on the "barbie," the punch is poured, the party-giver awaits and she has wisdom to share. She is calling out to you, can you hear her? AMEN.