

Sermon for August 18, 2024 - 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Proverbs 9:1-6; 13-18 (HCSB)

Theme: Where will your soul eat?

- 1) Compare the Chefs.
- 2) Compare the Food.
- 3) Compare the Consequences.

Proverbs 9:1–6

¹ Wisdom has built her house; she has carved out her seven pillars. ² She has prepared her meat; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. ³ She has sent out her female servants; she calls out from the highest points of the city: ⁴ “Whoever is inexperienced, enter here!” To the one who lacks sense, she says, ⁵ “Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine I have mixed. ⁶ Leave inexperience behind, and you will live; pursue the way of understanding.

Proverbs 9:13–18

¹³ The woman Folly is rowdy; she is gullible and knows nothing. ¹⁴ She sits by the doorway of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, ¹⁵ calling to those who pass by, who go straight ahead on their paths: ¹⁶ “Whoever is inexperienced, enter here!” To the one who lacks sense, she says, ¹⁷ “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten secretly is tasty!” ¹⁸ But he doesn’t know that the departed spirits are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Most of us understand the importance of healthy food: if you live on nothing but Big Macs and soda, you will probably have an early appointment with the grave. However, did you know that your soul needs proper nutrition every bit as much as your body? Even though we may have known this fact it is sad how often we live as if we don’t!

There are only two types of spiritual food in this world. One type will keep your soul healthy and alive. The other type will make you sick and die – not just physically, but eternally in hell. Our sermon text compares and contrasts these two types of “soul food” - as well as their sources. Let us learn from the insight God gave King Solomon to answer the question: **Where will your soul eat?** *Compare the chefs, compare the food and compare the consequences.*

If you have ever travelled to a foreign country, you know how hard it is to pick a place to eat. Why? Because you are “inexperienced”. You don’t know which restaurants are good and which you should avoid. If you don’t understand the language – you won’t know what’s on the menu.

When it comes to spiritual things we are all, by nature, inexperienced. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they lost the divine wisdom with which God created them. They became spiritually senseless, naïve and selfish.

All of Adam’s children are born in his likeness. By nature, none of us understand what is good. We are easily deceived. And just as crooks are always looking to take advantage of the weak – especially foreigners who don’t know any better - so also the devil, world and our own sinful nature want to prey on us.

Thankfully God does not want us lost to the devil. He cares for us deeply. This is why he planned a way to save us and invites us to come to Him.

Yes, both good and evil (Wisdom and Folly) are vying for our attention, calling out: *“Whoever is inexperienced, enter here!”*

Did you notice that verses 4 & 16 are virtually identical? The fact that both Folly and Wisdom sound the same illustrates that we, by nature, do not know to whom we are to listen. We are like visitors to a foreign nation: one restaurant tells us we should eat here, but another one tells us we should eat there. Where should we go? Does it really matter?

People often say: “All religions lead to the same place. It doesn’t matter how you worship God just as long as you worship him. Pick a church and stick with it.” Why do people say such things? Because they are inexperienced in spiritual matters. They assume that, just because all churches and religions claim to offer similar things that they are basically the same.

But this is not the case! Just as a con man will never tell you that he is offering you nothing but lies and hurt, so also the devil will always try to appear as an angel of light – someone we can trust. Therefore, it is important for us to look beyond the spiritual food being offered to our souls to who is doing the offering.

On the one side you have woman Folly. She represents the wisdom of the world, which is selfish and corrupted by the devil. Solomon describes her and her food in this way:

¹³ The woman Folly is rowdy; she is gullible and knows nothing. ¹⁴ She sits by the doorway of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, ¹⁵ calling to those who pass by, who go straight ahead on their paths: ¹⁶ “Whoever is inexperienced, enter here!” To the one who lacks sense, she says, ¹⁷ “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten secretly is tasty!”

When the world offers ways to spiritual purpose, peace, hope and self-fulfillment, it really does not know what it is talking about. Sure, the world sounds good. Who isn’t attracted to sentiments like: “Follow your heart. Do what seems best for you. Just let others be and do your best to be yourself. Don’t let others judge you because you have the potential to be special and great if you just follow your own path.” But what do these sentiments actually mean? They are nothing, help nothing and are utterly meaningless because they are based in selfish, feeling driven gobbledygook!

The spiritual food the world offers is basically one of two things: 1) hedonism (seek all the pleasure you can get out of life while you can) or 2) work righteousness (which basically is saying it’s up to you to find and cook your own spiritual food). This is the basic bread and water the world offers to all. It might seem good, but it only leads to trouble.

But then there is Wisdom. Who is she? Compare this section of Scripture to the parables Jesus spoke concerning the Great Banquetⁱ and the Wedding Feastⁱⁱ and it soon becomes clear that the Wisdom spoken of here is the Wisdom of God. It is Jesus himself, of whom Paul says in his letter to the Colossians: *All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Divine Wisdom is not a lazy lady like worldly Folly. Let us look at the fine details with which Solomon describes her:

Wisdom has built her house; she has carved out her seven pillars. Most ancient houses were lucky to have one or two pillars. But the house Jesus built has seven. In other words, God's house, the Church, is not some cheap building. No, it is beautiful and enduring. It is the grand sum of believers on earth and in heaven who, in the words of St. Peter, *as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*^{iv} Jesus built the Church as the place where we may receive the meal that He, in His wisdom, has prepared for our salvation.

Solomon continues the analogy: *She [Wisdom] has prepared her meat; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table.*

The Hebrew of this verse literally reads: *She has slaughtered her meat.* This "slaughtering" reminds us of all the lambs that were offered on Israel's altars – offerings that all pointed to the one great sacrifice Jesus would make on our behalf. Concerning this sacrifice, Isaiah wrote: *he (Jesus) was led like a lamb to the slaughter.*^v *Surely he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*⁶ *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*^{vi}

Jesus is the chef of our salvation - having willingly sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins. This is how he prepared for us His special meal of forgiveness, peace and hope. And how do we receive this food? Through repentance and faith. And what is repentance? It is two things: first of all being sorry for our sins – recognizing that we deserve God's righteous wrath because of them - and secondly believing in Jesus and His work for our forgiveness.

Jesus, therefore, is not only the chef, he is also the spiritual food we eat. His work and his word bring life to our souls and lead us on the right path.

King Solomon says that *Wisdom has sent out her female servants; she calls out from the highest points of the city:*⁴ *"Whoever is inexperienced, enter here!" To the one who lacks sense, she says,*⁵ *"Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine I have mixed.*⁶ *Leave inexperience behind, and you will live; pursue the way of understanding.*

Notice that Jesus cares for us so much that He doesn't just invite those who happen to stop by His house. No, he goes out and searches for guests – inviting everyone who is both near and far to his feast.

Now it is certainly true that Jesus himself isn't physically seen inviting people to faith (because he's in heaven preparing a place for us) but make no mistake: his voice is heard. Pastors, teachers, evangelists and all concerned Christians are the servants Jesus has sent into the world to seek and invite all people to His feast. The body He offered and blood He shed on the cross for our forgiveness is the spiritual bread and wine he invites us to receive. It is the precious food of forgiveness, life and salvation.

And so Jesus bids us leave all our inexperience behind – all the foolishness of our nature that only gets us in trouble. He wants us to know what is true, noble and good - offering us true righteousness and holiness as a gift. And, having received this gift through faith, we have life. God unites us to himself. He restores His image in us - the image which Adam and Eve had lost in the fall- and awakens in our hearts a desire to serve him instead of ourselves. His feast moves us to leave our sinful way of life behind so that we might remain in his house – feasting on His Word and Sacraments!

And what is the result of eating such food? It results in both awakening and sustaining us in our faith. It offers us true and eternal life with God in the perfect paradise he is even now preparing for us in heaven.

Oh how much better is this than the spiritual junk food worldly Folly offers us! Sure, the wisdom of the world may sound good, but it is worthless. The person who goes to her house for food doesn't realize that it is poison, *that the departed spirits are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol* (or to say it another way: Folly's guests are in hell's grip!)

There you have it. If you feed on the world's wisdom, you will soon find yourself away from God and in the company of the devil.

And so, dear Christian, listen to divine wisdom. Heed Christ's call to come and eat His food. Read your Bible. Have family devotions. Come to Church. Join a Bible class. Since the Word and Sacraments are the only place where you receive the feast God graciously offers for your salvation, center your whole life around the use of these means. Schedule your weeks and days around opportunities to meet with Christ through worship, Bible study and prayer.

If you don't you will soon find yourself swallowing the garbage the world offers you. You hear her voice everywhere – on TV, the radio, the internet and in print. Worldly Folly is a big proponent of social media and public education. She is heard in the voice of your friends who support your decisions to follow your own desires instead of God's Word. She is everywhere – proud and provocative, enticing you to your eternal death.

Divine Wisdom, however, is only found in the Gospel – always pointing you to life.

And so, dear Christian, where will you eat? Will you follow Folly or will you cling to Christ? My prayer is that, with the Spirit's aid, you cling to Christ – ever eating the wonderful feast for forgiveness He has prepared for you; centering your life around His means of grace. Then you will know divine Wisdom. Then you will have the eternal life God has graciously purposed for you since the beginning of time. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Luke 14:15-24

ⁱⁱ Cf. Matthew 22:1-10

ⁱⁱⁱ Colossians 2:3 HSCB

^{iv} 1 Peter 2:5 HCSB

^v Isaiah 53:7 NIV84

^{vi} Isaiah 53:4-6 NIV84