

The Way of Discernment

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost [b]

August 19, 2018

Proverbs 9:1-10

¹ Wisdom has built her house;

she has hewn her seven pillars.

² She has slaughtered her beasts;

she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table.

³ She has sent out her young women to call

from the highest places in the town,

⁴ "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"

To him who lacks sense she says,

⁵ **"Come, eat of my bread**

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

⁶ **Leave your simple ways, and live,**

and walk in the way of discernment."

⁷ Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,

and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

⁸ Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;

reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

⁹ Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;

teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is discernment.

In the Name of Jesus.

Our Lord gives us to see life.

He knows we're in a world of death, and he provides the way to look through that, and see the way of life.

In our own lives, he gives us to see his gift of life and all that goes with it: joy and thankfulness, delight and generosity, and always a view toward tomorrow.

For death destroys the tomorrow. It annihilates the person. With death, there is no tomorrow to look forward to, so that best you will ever have is what you have right now. Which leads to an empty way of living. With no view of tomorrow, you might as well grab what you can right now, hold onto to what you have and make sure none of it slips from your hand, and your neighbor will be living that same way, too.

Death reduces us to that. To just living for what we can hold onto right now—it reduces us to lives not of giving gifts and enjoying gifts from others, of no generosity and compassion, but of expecting the worst in the end, so trying to grab onto small scraps of life now.

So, our Lord gives us to see life. To rejoice in having a tomorrow. He does it by putting before us some of the beautiful imagery of life. He speaks of great gifts such as good food and the enjoyment of wine, and then speaks of the way of discernment. Proverbs 9:6:

⁵ **“Come, eat of my bread**

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

⁶ **Leave your simple ways, and live,**

and walk in the way of insight.”

Our translation this morning has the word “insight”—*to walk in the way of insight*. But in the Hebrew, the word speaks of distinguishing between separate things, of making a division—it is to discern

between two things. For the Lord, it is to discern between what is of death and what is of life, what is of foolishness and what is of wisdom.

So, our Lord speaks of two women. The first woman is folly, or foolishness. Proverbs 9:13:

¹³ The woman Folly is loud;

she is seductive and knows nothing.

¹⁴ She sits at the door of her house;

she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,

¹⁵ calling to those who pass by.

The other woman is Wisdom. Proverbs 9:1:

¹ Wisdom has built her house;

she has hewn her seven pillars.

² She has slaughtered her beasts;

she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table.

³ She has sent out her young women to call

from the highest places in the town,

⁴ "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"

To him who lacks sense she says,

⁵ "Come, eat of my bread

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

⁶ Leave your simple ways, and live,

and walk in the way of discernment."

So, our Lord has us walking down a road. We see two women, one on the right, the other the left. Who

to listen to? The one is Folly, the other Wisdom. The one loud and seductive, the other speaks wisdom. The one enticing, but with no life to give, the other inviting to a table of life.

Make the discernment. Divide between what is seductive, but going toward death, and what is wise and extolling life.

This discernment between what is of death and what is of life is King Solomon sitting on his throne, confronted by the two women in 1 Kings 3. In the night, one of the women has tragically lost her child when she rolled over on the infant and he died. So, she took the child belonging to the other woman and claimed him to be hers.

Now both women stand before Solomon claiming the living child as hers. How will Solomon make the discernment? How will he divide—which woman is of the truth and which of the lie? He will ask a question to allow each woman to speak either death or life. 1 Kings 3:24:

[King Solomon] said, “Bring me a sword.” So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.” Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, “Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death.” But the other said, “He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him.” Then the king answered and said, “Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.”

The one woman spoke life—“*by no means put the child to death,*” the other woman spoke death—“*the child shall be neither yours nor mine, divide him.*”

Now Solomon can make the discernment. Which woman spoke the lie? Which the truth? The lie belongs to death. The truth belongs to life. Solomon can now divide between the two. Give the child to the first woman, said Solomon, the one who spoke life.

Proverbs 9:6:

Live, and walk in the way of discernment.

Jesus gives us to see the way of life. He knows we live in a world of death. He knows we live in our own sinful flesh. He knows that everything about us in our life of flesh is of the lie and death. And he sets before us the opposite. John 6:51:

[Jesus said,] “I am the living bread that came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

And, John 6:56:

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from Heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Jesus has made the discernment. He has divided between the two, between death and life. He has looked upon our world and its lies and death, he has seen our own sinful flesh, and he has taken it all upon himself, putting it to death in his Body on the cross.

Then, the discernment, the dividing between the two: Having taken death upon himself, he has been raised up to life. Having looked on our sinful flesh, he has given us of himself, of his flesh and blood, and has brought us into life.

Now the discernment for us. Proverbs 9:6 and 10:

⁵ **“Come, eat of my bread**

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

⁶ **Leave your simple ways, and live,**

and walk in the way of discernment.”

¹⁰ **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,**

and the knowledge of the Holy One is discernment.

So we make the discernment. You live in your life of flesh. It is death. At the same time, you look upon him, Jesus, the holy One. He is your life. We divide between the two, keeping them separate.

The discernment is, we live in our life of flesh and in our life of faith, both at the same time. The division we are given is, *What we see in our world and what we see in our own flesh, this is death and the lie.*

But at the same time, what we see with our faith is him, Jesus. We hold to his righteousness. We rejoice in his gift of life. We find our delight in his grace, our confidence in the knowledge that he is the Holy One who justifies us and gives us life before his Father.

Like Solomon with the two women standing in front of him, we look at two realities in front of us. We look at the deceit of our world and our flesh and we say, *You are death, I do not belong to you, I have nothing to do with you.*

Then, like Solomon, we turn to the other to make the discernment. We look at the life and gifts of Jesus, and we say, *You are life, you are the living bread come down from Heaven, you are the One sent by the Father of all life, so that whoever feeds on you has the bread of life, and will live forever.*

We look on the Body and the Blood, we hear Jesus say, *Take and drink for the forgiveness of your sins,* and we make the discernment: *this is life, and it is life for me; it is my life before God and my life before all those belonging to Jesus.*

In the Name of Jesus.