

“Come to Wisdom’s Feast”

We have been talking about bread and other baked items for several weeks now. While Jesus being the bread of life is a powerful and indeed central tenant of our faith, I thought today might be a good time to talk about another life-giving concept, wisdom.

I suppose that many of you have seen or have one of these little books. It is a travel version of the Bible. It does not contain the entire Bible. It has the New Testament in its entirety, and from the Old Testament it has two books. There is the Book of Psalms which many have called the prayer book of the Bible. It includes 150 prayers and hymns of praise, wisdom, thanksgiving, and lament. This is a good book to have handy no matter where you are.

The other Old Testament section is The Book of Proverbs. I am not a huge fan of the Book of Proverbs. So much of the book is aphorisms about how to live a good and upright life. That is all well and good; it just strikes me as one-dimensional. That is the way aphorisms are. They generally have a kernel of truth, but they are oversimplified. For example, “Do not plan harm against your neighbor who lives trustingly beside you.”¹ Another is, “Do not quarrel with anyone without cause.”² These are undoubtedly good thoughts, but don’t seem to me to be particularly deep.

Another problem I have with this book is that it is not particularly religious. It is certainly not anti-God, but many of the aphorisms do not have anything to do with God or the life of faith. They are practical and would be worthwhile for anyone of any faith or no faith at all. It seems to say that if we live a life by these maxims we will get a nice obituary and be remembered as a good, if rather benign, person. That is not a bad goal per se, but I think God calls us to be more than just nice.

While aphorisms seem to be the majority of the book, sometimes it does surprise us. That is what happens today when we read part of chapter 9. This chapter is a comparison of ways of wisdom and folly. They are both personified as women. The woman of wisdom is nourishing and kind. The woman of folly leads people astray and ultimately to death. Not just death in body but also death in spirit.

As we see from the reading, the Woman of Wisdom builds herself a house with seven pillars. Remember that seven is the number of completeness in Judaism. Seven also reminds us of the seven days of the creation story. Wisdom’s house is complete and sturdy. Her house inspires admiration and confidence. The house of wisdom is like the house built upon rock³ which will withstand even the harshest storm. It is not only a house for wisdom but a house built by wisdom, as the scripture tells us that she is the one who has hewn the pillars.⁴

Now that her house is built, a house that might remind us of a Greek Temple, she prepares the feast with her own hands. She kills animals to be cooked for the feast. She mixes the wine with spices and water making it more palatable and less intoxicating. A wise woman does not want her guests to get drunk. As Paul writes in

¹ Proverbs 3:29 NRSV

² Proverbs 3:30 NRSV

³ Matthew 7:24

⁴ Proverbs 9:1

Ephesians, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.”⁵ Then she sets the table for her guests.

At this point the one thing missing is the guests. So she sends her servant girls out to the high places to call people to the feast. The ones that they call are not the already wise or astute. Wisdom calls the simple and the senseless. She calls out to those who desire wisdom, but have not yet received it. She calls them to be nourished saying, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity and live.”⁶

This is where I am grateful to have a wise woman as my partner in ministry. For Sonya selected one of my favorite poems and hymns for the choir to sing today. That is “The Call” by George Herbert. The poem echoes the call of Lady Wisdom with the repeated word “come.” It also echoes Jesus’ call to some of John the Baptist’s followers in the Gospel of John.⁷ Indeed, it could be either of them or God who is calling out to us to “Come”. The invitation is to a full life, a rich life, and a life filled with wisdom and love of God.

Herbert’s poem gives me goosebumps every time I read it, sing it, or hear it. You have heard it sung, but I think it is good to hear it read as well.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.⁸

This is what Lady Wisdom promises through her great feast for us simple folk. It is what Jesus promises as he offers us the bread of life. It is what God promises us through the psalmist who says, “Come, children, and listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”⁹

This Sunday is bracketed by the feast days of Jonathan Myrick Daniels and Maximillian Kolbe and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Two martyrs for the faith (look them up if you do not know them) and the *Theotokos*, god-bearer. I cannot think of better witnesses to wisdom, truth, and selfless love.

Come as they did to the table of truth, strength, joy and love, because it is the Lord who invites you. It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

⁵ Ephesians 5:18a NRSV

⁶ Proverbs 9:5-6 NRSV

⁷ John 1:39

⁸ “The Call” by George Herbert, 1633. Public Domain.

⁹ Psalm 34:11 The Book of Common Prayer.