

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Proverbs.ⁱⁱ

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the third Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy.ⁱⁱⁱ

“. . . These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits,

and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about Wisdom. The main thing it has to say is that Wisdom comes from God and leads back to Him. The book of Proverbs personifies Wisdom poetically as a lovely and gracious woman. In the New Testament, however, the Wisdom of God is personified in actuality by the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. It is Jesus Christ, the

incarnate Word of God, whom St Paul calls “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

The Wisdom that comes from God brings us back to God. So Jesus claims in St. John’s Gospel that it is the way, and the only way, to the Father.

The lovely woman in the book of Proverbs was present at the Creation. She is like the Word of God, who was not only present at the Creation but was instrumental in it. This Word of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, came down from heaven “and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary and was made man.” It is He who reveals the nature of God, as the Lesson says, and guards the paths of judgment, and preserves the way of His saints. He is prefigured by the woman called “wisdom” in the book of Proverbs.

The gracious woman in the book of Proverbs builds a house, prepares a feast, and invites everyone to come in. “Whoever is simple,” she says, “let him turn in here.” “To him who is without sense,” she says, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

Like her, the Lord Jesus has also built a house, which we call “the Church”, and He invites everyone to come in and learn the ways of God. But it requires effort and persistence to acquire Wisdom. “Seek it like silver,” says today’s Lesson, “and search for it as for hidden treasure.” “Straight is the path and narrow is the gate,” says Jesus.

What makes the quest for Wisdom difficult is that there is another kind of wisdom out there. This faux wisdom does not come from God; it comes from pride. It comes from the desire for personal power and prestige. It involves both ignorance of God and contempt for His ways. Such wisdom, which is rampant in the world, is actually foolishness parading as Wisdom. If, as the Psalmist says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,”

it is also true, as the Psalmist also says, that “The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’”.

The book of Proverbs depicts that kind of worldly wisdom as a seductress, a beautiful woman who leads men astray. She is called “a strange woman”, which is to say an interloper, who beguiles with flattery and false promises. That kind of wisdom appears very early in the Bible.

In the Garden of Eden, Eve is beguiled and led astray, not by a beautiful woman but by a serpent and a tree, which, of course, is rooted in the earth. “If you follow my advice,” says the serpent, “and ignore God, and His silly commandments, then you and your husband will become Gods yourselves and control your own lives and destiny”. And when Eve saw that the tree was pleasant to the eyes and would make one wise, she took the deadly fruit and ate it and gave some to her husband to eat. The result was not the attainment of Wisdom. Quite the opposite: the result was enmity with God, enmity with her husband, enmity with the natural order, and enmity with the serpent who had beguiled her.

The Wisdom that comes from God and leads us to God is contrasted in the Epistle of St. James with the wisdom that is of human origin. Listen to what that writer says:

“If ye have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, receptive, full of mercy and good fruits, with no indecisiveness or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown by the peacemakers.”

Listen also to what St. Paul says when he writes to the church in Corinth. He begins with a paraphrase from the Prophet Isaiah: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will bring to nothing.” Then the Apostle goes on to say, “I did not come to you proclaiming the testimony of God in

lofty words or wisdom. I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

That is what the world cannot understand. What kind of a God is it who humbles Himself and submits to humiliation and death? The answer is really very simple. The God who does that is the God who is worthy of honor and loyalty and service.

Now I know that there is a lot of wisdom in this congregation. The intelligence level in this building every Sunday is intimidating. I am awed by the accomplishments that are out there among you. But what pleases me is your faithfulness in coming to the house of God every Sunday to learn of His ways, to eat of His bread and drink of His wine. I am gratified by your diligent pursuit of Wisdom

Let us pray:

O God, by who the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly: Grant us in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the Spirit of Wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928/1943).

ⁱⁱ Proverbs 2:1-9 (KJV).

ⁱⁱⁱ I Timothy 3:14—4:16 (KJV).