

Proverbs 9: 1-6; John 6: 51-58 Ordinary 18B

Proverbs 9: 1-6: Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. 2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. 3 She 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. 6 Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.

John 6: 51-58: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’ 52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ 53 So Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.’

It is good to be back. I had a wonderful time in Japan but did miss worshipping with you, and so I was very grateful and realized all over again how important it is that this congregation continues to offer Zoom service for those who cannot attend in person to experience the corporate worship. The word “corporate” comes from a word in Latin that means “body.” It is not the same as being together in person, but still, being able to see and hear not just the preacher and the liturgist but also, more importantly, the musicians and the choir and fellow worshippers, allows the Zoom viewers to experience being part of one body. We worship as one body. And this worshipping body, the church, becomes the living body, the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ given for the life of the world.

Indeed, the act of corporate worship is life-giving, even when the sermon didn’t particularly resonate nor spoke to you personally, or the hymns were

unfamiliar and not your favorite, *because* we are becoming one with and in the flesh and blood of Christ by the power of the Spirit of the Living God. It is not our doing but God's.

We may celebrate the Lord's Supper only once a month to partake in the elements of bread that is his flesh and "wine" that is his blood, but every time we come together in worship, we are fed with the living bread from heaven, and "taste and see the goodness of the Lord." The church is enlivened by this living bread that came down from heaven.

There may not be a lot of people attending the service via live Zoom, but there is a dozen or so who view the recording of it, (right, James?) Our typical worship attendance in person is 22 (right, Rob?) so, a dozen people viewing the recording is a significant part of those who experience the life-giving act of corporate worship through this congregation. Even when we struggle with technical difficulties that delay the start of worship, and a volunteer moving here and there with the iPhone camera on a tripod during worship may feel awkward at times, it is an important ministry of this church. As the words of the Psalmist in today's Call to Worship tell us, "those who honor God don't lack a thing." Those words of the Scripture are true not just for individual believers but also for the collective body of a worshipping community.

So, thanks to the Zoom ministry, I was able to listen to Rev. Lynne Hinton preach last Sunday. Like a gifted writer that she is, she vividly told us the story of Elijah; how he had done what was required of him and still suffered a great disappointment, a threat, even, and how Elijah, exhausted in body and spirit, wished he would die, and how God sent an angel with food and water so that he might not only live but make the journey he was called to make.

Through her rich retelling of the story, we heard that God is God who does not judge or accuse when we have lost our spirit but comes to us in an angel

bearing food and water to lift our spirit and revive our body. This insight into God who provides us with life-giving food is also shared in today's reading from Proverbs, part of the Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Scripture.

As Margaia read to us, here, it is not an angel who bore the gift of sustenance but the Spirit of Divine Wisdom, personified as a woman, also known as Hagia Sophia, or Holy Wisdom in Greek. You can see a modern rendition of it by a young person on the front of the bulletin for today.

Wisdom was there when God conceived the heaven and earth, collaborating with God in birthing the universe. The number of pillars that held her house together was 7, which is the number for completeness, fullness and perfection in the Hebrew Scriptures. Lady Wisdom prepared a choice meat and carefully concocted wine and laid the table for the feast.

But then, she sent her servant girls out and herself left her house and went to the highest place in the town, and from there she called out to those who were needful and invited them in to eat her bread and drink her wine. She did all this, so that those who would receive her offerings would "lay aside immaturity and live."

What Wisdom offers is no quick meal of "grub and go"; it is no fast food; it can't be gulped down. What Wisdom offers is a rich, involved dinner that is nourishing and promises to be deeply satisfying, if savored. And to savor it, one must leave behind one's taste for instant noodles.

While I was visiting my hometown last week, I stopped by the bookstore I used to frequent years ago, just out of curiosity. Restaurants and shops had all changed, but that bookstore still stood, unchanged for all those decades. As a teenager with not much allowance money, I remember walking in from the street to quickly browse the pages of fashion magazines or magazines on Hollywood movies, with such names as "The Roadshow" or "Screen." I didn't intend to spend my money on them; I just wanted to have a taste. Their colorful pictures and

glossy covers lured people into the store, in a manner not unlike the magazines that line along the registers at Walgreens.

This time, having grown up, I had no appetite for those magazines. Instead, I wondered where the genre for wisdom literature was. My eyes searched for the headings for Religion, Philosophy, Spirituality, and so on. The bookstore had 4 floors. The ground floor was full of books and magazines with attractive covers, crowded with people standing to browse; large coffee table books of photography, art books and the best sellers. I went to the 2nd floor and there were self-help books for success, business and marketing, vocational textbooks and study guides. I continued onto the 3rd floor, where there were a lot less people and the shelves had scholarly texts and professional books and references. Finally on the 4th floor, I found what I was looking for, the sections for psychology, world religions, philosophy, books on meditation and mystics. I took time walking down the aisles undisturbed, for I was one of a few customers on the floor.

As people of faith, who gather at the house Wisdom built and filled with rich life-giving feast, what are we looking for? What is the way of insight the Spirit of Wisdom is calling us to walk in? At this time, in this house of God.

Whereas an angel of God brought food and water to Elijah, whereas Lady Wisdom carefully prepared a feast of rich food and spiced wine and offered to us, Jesus offered himself, his own flesh and blood as the living bread that gives eternal life.

Any ministry of a church that is the flesh and blood of the Living, resurrected Christ is essentially and ultimately life-giving. The Spirit transforms *us*, who come to worship and are fed, into the living body of Christ given for the life of the world. We who come to this house of God as grateful guests and receive the life-sustaining nourishment, are called to be the gracious host in turn, inviting all to feed on the life-giving heavenly bread.

This church has a food pantry ministry and distribute life-sustaining food boxes. The church offers her physical space to a life-healing counseling service and life-saving AA meetings, and life-deepening meditation practice. The creators of beautiful quilts gather every month here to engage in life-enriching work of creating beauty

I wonder, as I live deeper into my third year of service in your midst, to what other ministries the Spirit might be calling this body of Christ. Then I remember, Lady Wisdom, having built the house and laid the table of rich food, left her house and went out into the town announcing her offering of nourishment. I wonder if the Spirit is calling us to go out beyond these walls.

I wonder if it's God's still small voice whispering, when people tell me, as I know some of you have also heard or experienced, how there are people who are not able to receive the kind of help they need at home; and I hear the desire of the people to help those in need, whether it is helping for a time after someone came back from the hospital, or doing light work around the house that would greatly improve the quality of their lives. The kind of service that typically done by Deacons. And there was a time this church had Deacons, those who commit to the acts of compassion, walking with Jesus.

No easy answers. What does it mean for this church now to walk with Jesus who is the living bread from heaven, to grow from grateful guests at the Lord's table in the house of Wisdom to gracious hosts of the living bread, as small as we are. Then remember the words of the Psalmist, those who revere God, honor God, or seek God, lack nothing.

I wonder... don't you?