

Title: Wisdom's Invitation

Subtitle: The fullness of divine life is yours for the asking

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/VKAjFI0tx8>

The readings today follow where we left off last week. The themes we have been covering center on God's gracious invitation to a feast, where the words: come, believe, and eat are in focus.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus declares, **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever."**<sup>1</sup> While such an invitation may initially seem strange and maybe even a little off-putting, it is still meaningful and profound. In eating His flesh, we partake of His life of surrender. When we drink of his blood, we take into ourselves His life poured out on the cross. The heart and soul of Christianity is the life of our Savior who died on the cross in our place. It may seem like foolishness, but ***"the message of the cross is both the power of God and the wisdom of God."***<sup>2</sup> This is something that takes some work to understand. Spiritual insight does not come easily. It is like digging for gold. Very few nuggets of gold are found lying on top of the ground. You have to search and dig for it, but since it takes work, not everyone has the perseverance it takes.

This truth is playfully illustrated by a story that took place in one of our larger churches, where multiple evening programs were simultaneously taking place. In the sanctuary, as the priest was standing in front of the altar about to bless the bread and the wine for Holy Communion, the large, heavy, red front doors of the church cracked open. The evening sunlight streamed through as all the worshippers were turning their heads, focusing on the person who propped open the door with his foot and started down the aisle with a stack of steaming hot pepperoni pizza. The timing could not have been better or worse, depending on one's perspective. Since there was no one else to receive him, he walked all the way down the aisle with those pizzas and met the priest at the altar, where he was redirected towards the auditorium where the youth group was meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:51

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:24

The priest who was officiating took the interruption as a teachable moment. He said, “Jesus has cracked the heavy door of heaven open and has come down the aisle to give himself for the life of the world.”<sup>3</sup> It’s so easy to miss this fundamental aspect of the Christian faith. The bread that he offers is his flesh which was broken and given so that we might feast on the riches of heaven.

Although those in the sanctuary that night didn’t get to eat it, the pizza made them think again about how the whole story of Jesus is one about delivery. In clarifying this point, the priest said, “It’s not take-out, nor is it simply a pick-up service. It’s God delivering ‘the living bread’ right where we live, even if, for some, it may seem like an interruption.”<sup>4</sup> In most of our lives, those kinds of interruptions are needed. They help us to stop and reevaluate how we are being pushed and pulled in different directions by a culture that has lost its spiritual bearings. And we live in a culture that wants everything quick, easy, and hand delivered.

I had one person who said to me, “I chose the Episcopal Church because I want a version of Christianity that is light.” By that she meant, that she wanted her faith to be easy and comfortable. But honestly, she was not realistic. There are some aspects of the Christian faith that are confusing and difficult. Picking up one’s cross to follow Jesus and finding the straight and narrow way are two obvious examples of what I am talking about. I do not want to be offensive, but the Gospel has a way of stepping on our toes whether we like it or not. It also has a way of interrupting us with our agendas because God has a bigger plan and a better plan than we could ever imagine.

This dynamic is as true for us as it was true for the Ephesians to whom Paul wrote in our New Testament lesson today. They were being tempted to get sidetracked with all sorts of worldly diversions. Therefore Paul admonished them with these words, ***“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”***<sup>17</sup> ***So do not be foolish, but understand***

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<sup>3</sup> Story taken from From “A Sermon for Every Sunday (2021)” by Phillip Martin Jr.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

***what the will of the Lord is.***<sup>5</sup> They had temptations to heed worldly invitations to reckless levity and the wasting of time with things that do not ultimately satisfy. We all have to contend with these distractions, whether it be from our cell phones or from the media. And I have to, and I have to fight to stay focused. So it takes wisdom and discernment to understand what the will of the Lord is. The original word Paul used for “understanding” when he wrote about the will of the Lord was a compound word that implies “a comprehensive putting together”<sup>6</sup> of God’s interwoven ways. In other words, there is a synthesis of godly principles that you have to put together in order to have a balanced spirituality.

The invitation that is made in the Book of Proverbs is to those who see themselves as lacking this kind of discernment. They recognize that dealing with evil in the world and in themselves is not simple.

In today’s reading from Proverbs, we see a personification of wisdom that plays host to a grand affair. Here, Lady Wisdom has built her house, slaughtered her beasts, mixed her wine, set her table, and sent out her servants to make the invitation known to those who are naive. Wisdom’s feast offers prudence, strength, riches, and honor, which stands in stark contrast with Lady Folly’s, who is described in the rest of the chapter. The pseudo feast that she provides is “***stolen water and bread eaten in secret.***”<sup>7</sup> Therefore the call is given to avoid her ways. We must come, learn, listen and partake of God’s wisdom. It is a wisdom that James describes as “***first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.***”<sup>8</sup>

The call to grow in this kind of wisdom is much like an invitation to a great feast that lavishly provides all kinds of delicious food. Food is a central part of our lives. Our culture is filled with choices in what we want to eat, and we have the luxury of being picky. And because we live in a pluralistic culture, we can also be picky about spiritual things. The temptation we all have is to choose only those things that some

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<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:15-17

<sup>6</sup> Strong’s Concordance, #4920 *suníemi*, meaning: to set together, to understand

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 9:17

<sup>8</sup> James 3:17

would describe as easy and entertaining. So we must be careful not to choose to feed only on those things, never steps on our toes, and convicts us of sin. We must search for wisdom as one ***“looking for it as for silver and searching for it as one would look for hidden treasure.”***<sup>9</sup> But like any adventure, the going can get tough.

In our Gospel today, people were coming to Christ for one thing, and when he didn't offer what they wanted, they became disillusioned. Then when he spoke of things they didn't understand, they started to grumble and complain, and by the end of their encounter, they decided to turn away. They were unwilling to approach his teachings as learners. In response, Jesus said, ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me”*** (John 6:44-45)

As you hear these words, I feel a need to ask, “do you feel and sense that God is drawing you? Do you hear the invitation to come to a feast of rich foods and aged wines? If so, does that not draw you? If his body was broken and his blood was shed, does that not draw you? He comes offering wisdom to those who know they lack it; does that not draw you? When I think about the fact that He loves me with unfailing love, I find myself being drawn. When he speaks and says, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,”***<sup>10</sup> my heart is drawn. When I hear about all the perplexing things that are happening in our world, I ask God to draw me and help me to pray about these things and lay them at his feet.

The food has been prepared, and the wine has been mixed. Our responsibility is to come. The Eucharistic banquet is set before us every week. Knowing and loving God is what we are all about, as we ask God to ***“Draw us, and we will run after you.”***<sup>11</sup> Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 2:4

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 11:28

<sup>11</sup> Song of Solomon 1:4 (New King James Version)

## Reflections Questions

- Compare and contrast wisdom and folly: What are their personalities? Life-styles? Messages? Results?
- Compare Paul's view of the Spirit-filled life with your own? In comparison how full have you been with the Spirit this week? What do you want to work on so that He may fill you more?
- How would you describe your daily spiritual diet? (Suggestions: junk food, baby food, left-overs? Meat and potatoes? Pure bread and wine?)