**Proverbs 9:1-6** Wisdom has built her house. She has carved out her seven pillars. 2She has prepared her meat. She has mixed her wine. She has already set her table. 3She has sent out her servant girls. She calls from the highest point in the city, 4“Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here.” To someone who lacks sense she says, 5“Come, eat my food, and drink the wine that I have mixed. 6Abandon your naïve ways and live. Travel the road to understanding.”

Did you pay attention to all of the readings for today? I ask that because I wonder if you caught how the three readings complimented each other. It is just an interesting thing to note. For instance, our first reading is one that encourages wisdom. That’s the text we will look at in depth today. The second lesson, our Epistle reading, is one where we are given the example of and encouraged to be not the unwise but the wise. Of course, it is made clear in that reading that wisdom is understanding, and to our best, living the will of God as laid out in his word. Then comes the Gospel reading, our third lesson on wisdom. The gist of the Gospel reading is not to reject the wisdom that God has given. God has given us that wisdom, his wisdom in the very words, actions and life of Jesus. Yes, to reject Jesus is to reject the wisdom of God.

That takes us back then to the book of Proverbs. Such an interesting and wonderful book but perhaps not as utilized as it should be. Martin Luther in his introduction to the Book of Proverbs said of it, “It may properly be called a book of good works, for in it he [Solomon] teaches how to lead a good life before God and the world.” That’s a pretty remarkable statement. Or how about this statement found in my sermon study book. It said, *“Proverbs certainly speaks to our day with its emphasis on relative morality and situation ethics. This popular ‘wisdom’ is shown to be ‘folly.’ There is a God who judges every aspect of our lives by an immutable holy standard, and in the end that which is judged to be ‘foolishness’ by this world will prove to be the way of true wisdom.” (Sermon Studies of the Old Testament, Series B. page 307.)*

What is a proverb? Most would simply assume that they are short, pithy statements meant to teach a lesson. In many cases that is true, but not all the time. A proverb can be two short lines or it can be a longer discourse on a particular subject. Our book of Proverbs contains both styles. The short statement or style, found so often in our book is set up in the format that is a *“mashal,”* a Hebrew word that means “parallel or similar.” In other words they are short statements meant to teach and train by setting up contrasts.

Let me share with you some examples of this type of proverb. I tried to pick proverbs that are very pertinent to today. I think you will appreciate the words. The “mashals” start with chapter 10. 10:8 **“A wise heart accepts commands, but a babbling fool will be ruined.”** 11:11 **“Through the blessing of upright citizens, a city is raised up, but by the mouth of the wicked, it is torn down.”** 14:15 **“A gullible person trust everything, but a sensible person considers his steps.”** 20:11 **“Even a youth makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright.”** 25:28,one of my favorites, **“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”**

Those are just some of the examples of the type of short statement proverb. Not only do they sound good, but you will find that if you spend some time thinking about them, working to grasp what they mean, you will find you gain in wisdom. Not just any wisdom, but wisdom from the Lord.

The same is also true of those longer sections of the Book of Proverbs, those sections that are a discourse on a particular subject. For instance in the first 9 chapters of Proverbs there is actually a whole discourse on the importance and wonder of wisdom. Not just any wisdom but wisdom clearly defined and laid out. Please note that our section is found in chapter 9. It is really the conclusion, the wrap up of the lesson on wisdom. It would be good for us to contemplate what is said. Our theme will be: **WISDOM!**

One of the joys of this section is wrestling with the particular style of literature that is found here. In the section that is before us we have the literary device known as “personification.” Personification is where an inanimate object or idea is given human characteristics or even portrayed with human actions and words. In this particular case, wisdom is given greater meaning because of the way in which she is described and because of the actions that she is found involved in. Just as wisdom is personified, so is “folly.’ It is as we come to grips with all this information that we begin to grasp the wonder and importance of wisdom in our lives.

Look at the first line. It says, **“Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars.”** Wisdom is all that is good and pleasing to God. Perhaps the best place to see what wisdom is all about is found at the beginning of chapter 2. There we read these words: **“My son, if you accept my words, if your store up my commands within you, by paying attention to wisdom with your ear, by reaching out for understanding with your heart, if indeed you call out for intelligence, if you raise your voice for understanding, if you search for it like silver, if you hunt for it like hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord, then you will find the knowledge of God, because the Lord gives wisdom.”**

Here is the true nature of wisdom. Wisdom is of and from the Lord. Wisdom is what God wants of our lives. This can be seen in numerous ways. For instance, in our verse wisdom is described as having built a house, a house with seven pillars. It is this line and many others that helps us see that wisdom is really the entire plan of God for the salvation of the world. Wisdom is found in God’s grace, mercy, and his love for the souls of the world that lead God to reveal his plan to save. Yes, the house is a reference to the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. The number seven is the number in Scripture that speaks of God working in the world. We can see that as we hear in Revelation of the seven golden lampstands or of the seven stars or the sevenfold spirit of God, all these things closely connected with Jesus and what he does and is. Clearly wisdom is something we are to want, something precious from God and connected with how God works in this world. Wisdom is found in the gift of the Church that God has given the world, the Church that is involved in the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

There is more to learn of wisdom. Our next line sheds more light. It says, **“She has prepared her meat. She has mixed her wine. She has already set her table. She has sent out servant girls. She calls from the highest point of the city.”** Again a good knowledge of Scripture helps us understand the picture given here. Throughout God’s Word, especially in the Old Testament, the eternal kingdom of God and its joys are presented as a banquet and feast for all of God’s children to enjoy. We hear in Isaiah 25:6 **“On this mountain the Lord of Armies will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of aged wines, with the best cuts of meat.”** That whole section of Isaiah is a prophecy of the eternal salvation that will be ours in Jesus. It is thus striking that our section uses the same language. As we think of this meat and wine, how could we miss the connection to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and the life giving force that this meal presents?

Or notice that wisdom sends out her maids and calls from the highest point of the city. Think of how Jesus spoke in his parables of the king sending out his servants to proclaim the banquet ready and to invite the people to come. The fact that the invitation goes out from the highest point of the city is there to remind us that God’s invitation is for all people. Again think of the passages that you have heard that tell God’s people to **“shout, cry out and proclaim”** everywhere the wonder of God.

The next line helps us grasp even more. It says, and remember this is the servants sent out speaking, **“Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here.” To someone who lacks sense she says, “Come, eat my food, and drink the wine that I have mixed. Abandon your naïve ways and live. Travel the road to understanding.”** Notice that listening to the invitation of the servants is listening to the invitation of Wisdom! And notice that partaking of her food and drink helps us to overcome being simple, helps us to live in the way of understanding.

To grasp what all of this is saying I’ll simply go back to other passages found in this rather long discourse on wisdom found at the beginning of the book. 1:7 says, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but stubborn fools despise wisdom and discipline.”** Go back to the words of chapter 2 that I already quoted. They ended this way, **“Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, then you will find the knowledge of God, because the Lord gives wisdom.”** Or how about from chapter 3:5-6 which says, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.”**

It is rather clear that our section is speaking of the importance of God and His Word. His Word is the source of wisdom and knowledge. His Word leads us to the truth and marvel of our salvation. His Word helps us overcome our simple way, the way of the world, the way of work righteousness. Sinful mankind thinks that the best way to be is in how good you are or whether or not you do and say things more righteously and morally than the person next to you. And look at how strange the world’s wisdom is because the world can’t even discern right and wrong. The world thinks abortion is good, discipline is bad, lawlessness is freedom and sex is everything. But that is the simple way the foolishness of the sinful nature. It takes wisdom, the wisdom of God granted by the Holy Spirit to see that our salvation is not found in us but rather is found in Jesus. Instead of looking to ourselves, we look to the Lord and what he has accomplished. The greatest wisdom of all is the knowledge of our sins forgiven in Jesus because he atoned for us, because Jesus in the greatest act of love ever known. To grasp He won forgiveness and grants eternal life.

Didn’t we learn through Jesus and his apostles that it is not this world’s food and drink that is the most important! It is God’s food and drink that counts. Think of our Gospel reading. Jesus said, **“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your fathers ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever**.**”** The food of God is our Savior Jesus. But do you know how many despise that food? How many turn away from the wisdom of God found in this passage? The majority of the world thinks that God and His Son Jesus are the utmost in foolishness and folly. “I have no time for Jesus” is the clear message of the life of many. Jesus is always on the back burner or no burner at all. Something is always more important than church or hearing the Word. They have lost him! They have despised wisdom and her invitation!

Now as I mention earlier, I think it important for you to know that this section at times speaks of “Folly.” Folly is the counterpoint to wisdom. Let me share one such section. Chapter 7:24-27 **“Now, you sons, listen to me. Pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn in her direction. Do not wander on her pathways, because she has brought down many victims. Those she has killed are countless. Her house is a road to the grave. It goes down to the chambers of death.”** As you study this book you will discover that “Folly” is described as a loose and immoral woman who will lead you away from God. She opposes everything of God and pretends that she is greater and more knowledgeable than Wisdom. And pay attention, because Folly likes to imitate, to impersonate Wisdom. Folly is the personification of the false religions and philosophies of the world. Beware of them, especially as you discover that they lead away from Jesus and his wonder.

This section of Proverbs is so wonderfully interesting. It encourages us in our Christian faith and life. It invites us to make the Lord and his path our path. It leads us to the path of righteousness that is found in Jesus. He is the giver of eternal life. He is the core of our hearts. He is the One that Wisdom wants to share with us and that Wisdom wants to feed us with. May you know the difference between Wisdom and Folly! May you hear the invite of wisdom and come to that eternal feast prepared in Jesus for all. Amen.