

Wise Dining

a sermon

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Trinity Reformed Church

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Proverbs 9:1–6

Just a few days ago, John Bernhard and I were talking about sweets.

Candy. Cookies. Brownies.

Mmmm.

We like sweets.

Can you blame us?

But we also *don't* like sweets. No we don't!

Mmmm.

We were commiserating with each other about sweet foods. Why is it that cookies and kuchen, donuts and brownies and the like are so good yet so bad?

I know that baked goods and fried foods and all manner of junk food are not consciously malevolent forces. They don't plot among themselves to do us harm. They don't, with malice aforethought, devise schemes to get us to consume them, schemes that turn out to be wildly successful. (Smart cookies!)

But sometimes it seems so.

There's something evil about the way that they get their claws into you (or would that be their calories?) and make you crave them more and more. There's something perverse about how easy it is to get hooked on food that is bad for you. Your body gets used to it, and then wants it **ALL THE TIME**.

But John and I also shared with each other that it can work the other way, too. We've both found that cutting out or at least cutting down on the junk food and replacing it with good food soon teaches your body to crave the good food and no longer to crave the bad.

Smart!

Yeah, but such smartness take practice. It takes effort. Eating wisely is something one has to work at. Sure, it comes easier for some than for others. But they will admit that, even for them, it is a decision, and that sometimes they, too, are not so smart about what they eat.

And then they realize that they want nothing more than the good food. They crave it, they delight in it, they see it as a great gift from beyond themselves.

So it goes with wise dining.



The Bible passage I read, from the Book of Proverbs, is about wisdom. It portrays wisdom as a person — a woman, to be precise. Lady Wisdom is the central character in these verses. And what Lady Wisdom does is prepare a marvelous feast, complete with the best to eat and drink, the best she has to offer: wisdom itself.

She sends out her servants to tell people they are invited to this feast, a feast of wisdom. She herself shouts out this invitation from towers and balconies around town. She doesn't invite only the deserving. She doesn't invite only those who are already wise. No, Lady Wisdom invites to her banquet table, to this experience in wise dining, even the foolish, even (or especially) the unwise:

*“You who are simple, turn in here!”
To those without sense she says,
“Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.”*

It's a banquet that you don't earn the right to attend, but rather in accepting the invitation and partaking of the food you show that you have been made worthy of your attendance, as you, the formerly foolish, are now wise, having dined at the table of wisdom.

In the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is named a lot. And it's clear that wisdom is not the same as intelligence. To be wise is not about being smart. It's not about books or grades. It's not about being good with numbers or skilled with tools.

Throughout Proverbs, wisdom is a matter of *faith*. It is an essential component of a good relationship with *God*. As understood in Proverbs, and many other places in the Bible, the wise

seek to know God,
obey God,
follow God,
honor God,
serve God...

and they do.

Here, this faithful and God-honoring wisdom is portrayed as a woman both ancient and wise offering a great feast to many *and* as the great feast itself.

Wisdom is both the chef and the meal.

Wisdom is both invitation and gift.

Wisdom is both from the dawn of time and fresh food laid out before you.



I love it that wisdom is portrayed in these ways. Because it is easy to think of wisdom in pretty dry or flat ways:

a set of rules to follow,
a list of things to know,
a bunch of Bible verses to memorize,
“is”
and “ought”
and “must.”

Or, wisdom in our understanding becomes something negative:

an ideal we'll never reach,
a litany of failures we'll never live down,
a feeling that we'll never measure up.

Instead, there is great promise, and hope, and grace in wisdom shown as something to be consumed, and ingested, and savored. The wise in God are those

who dine wisely,
who eat of Lady Wisdom's meat,
who drink of her wine,

and so will feast on what God wills and what God teaches.



Again, wisdom in this sense is focused on God. Yet there is a knowledge component to the wisdom of faith.

But what is known with this wisdom?

Facts?
Skills?
This and that?
How to do?

Those are all good things to know. But with the wisdom of faith, the feast of Lady Wisdom, it's about knowing *God*.

That's not easy. Of course, that's not easy.

God is God. We are not.

And besides that, knowing God, or knowing God better, is a far deeper thing than simply knowing a subject. Faithful wisdom is not knowing things *about* God. It is *knowing* God.

I tell you, there are plenty of people who know lots of things *about* God, but whose personal knowledge of God is inch deep, if that.

No, this wisdom requires a personal connection, an investment of the self. Because God is personal. So for God to be known and for godly wisdom to grow there has to be personal investment.

That personal investment is two sided.

God has already made the personal investment from God's side. God created you. God gave you life and health and abilities and family and friends and so much more. In many ways but supremely in Jesus Christ, God shows and makes real and effective God's love for you.

Making the lion's share of personal investment in the personal knowledge that is at the heart of faithful wisdom, God now invites you to make your *own* personal investment:

with prayer,
and study of scripture,
and worship,

and deeds of mercy,
in forgiving those who have wronged you,
in forgiving yourself.

But this personal investment appears to be a big ask for a good number of us.
Even as we hunger.

It's as if in our hunger we reach for spiritual junk food, and gorge on empty calories for our souls. Lady Wisdom spreads a table of the best food before us, yet we turn up our noses in bored disinterest.

What is wrong with us?

Yet the wise in God are those

who dine wisely,
who eat of Lady Wisdom's meat,
who drink of her wine,

and so will feast on what God wills and what God teaches.

Will *we*?



This wisdom is not only about knowing God better. You see, if you're going to know God better, then you're going to have to get to know yourself better.

Eew!

Yep, I'm sorry about that, but knowing yourself is a necessary part of knowing God. And what you learn about yourself as you get to know God better is a mixed bag. You will learn the good, the bad, and the ugly.

You will learn that you did not know yourself very well. You may even learn that you have been quite wrong about who you are. You will learn that you wear masks to hide yourself from others, and even from yourself. You will notice your flimsy excuses, and you will see your empty boasts.

As you feed on God's word and become wiser in the things of God, you will see that your motives were often not as pure as you had thought they were.

You will see, and know, that you are a sinner.

But you will also see God loving into being strong things, beautiful things about you that you never knew were in you.

You will see, and know, that you are loved, and blessed, and forgiven, and empowered.

This will happen as you dine at wisdom's table, growing in your knowledge of God and of yourself.

There's more.

This faithful wisdom is not only about knowing God better, and knowing yourself better. If you're going to grow in wisdom, then you will have to know *others* better.

Eew!

Yep, I'm sorry about that, but becoming more understanding of other people is a necessary part of knowing God and knowing yourself. And what you will learn about others as you dine at Lady Wisdom's table is a mixed bag. You will learn the good, the bad, and the ugly.

You will learn more about what makes people tick. You will learn what they need, what they love, their hopes and fears and quirks. You will learn that, just as you have masks, they too have masks.

As you feed on God's word and become wiser in the things of God, you will see that their motives were often not as pure as you had thought they were.

You will see, and know, that they are sinners.

But you will also see God loving into being strong things, beautiful things about them that they and you never knew were in them.

You will see, and know, that they are loved, and blessed, and forgiven, and empowered.

The point of this learning, for those who dine wisely, is not to control or manipulate others.

It's not to get something out of them.

It's not to convince them or persuade them to do what you want.

It's not to increase our attendance or to balance our budget.

It's not to make things more comfortable for us.

There are plenty of people who learn about others for those reasons.

But not those who seek to be wise before God.

For us, the reason must be love. The point of learning more about others

is so we can love them,
so we can have compassion for them,
so we can help them,
so we can forgive them,
so we can bless them...
just as God has.

This will happen as you dine at wisdom's table, growing in your knowledge of God and of yourself and of others.



My friends, Lady Wisdom spreads before us a table of the best food. It's a feast of wisdom, more banquet than book, a delight for body and for soul, given to us for our nourishment and for God's glory.

The wise in God are those

who dine wisely,
who eat of Lady Wisdom's meat,
who drink of her wine,

and so will feast on what God wills and what God teaches.

Will we?

*O taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.*