

## Wisdom Calls

Proverbs 9:1-10

One of the most famous poems in Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood/And sorry I could not travel both/And be one traveler, long I stood." A traveler reaches a fork in the road, and has to choose which way to go. For though "both that morning equally lay/In leaves no step had trodden black," the reality is that no two paths are the same. He had to make a choice. He had to commit, because you cannot stand at the fork in the road refusing to choose your entire life. The poem ends, Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the author (probably Solomon) sets before us two ways, two paths. The way of wisdom, and the way of folly. The way of wisdom follows God's commands, and leads to life. The way of folly follows sinful desires, and leads to death. Wisdom looks difficult at first, but leads to good that lasts. Folly looks good at first, but the false façade hides disaster.

As ISU begins another school year, they come in search of knowledge. They want to learn the right chemical formulas, the right equations, the right programming commands, the right amount of feed or fertilizer to pass their classes and finish with a good job offer. They come here to learn the knowledge they need to succeed in life. They come here to gain knowledge in engineering, in agronomy, in genetics, in the STEM fields that are so in demand right now, that lead to the jobs of the future.

But while they're here to gain knowledge, they will need wisdom, too. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not using one in a fruit salad. Knowledge can be good or bad. Wisdom helps use knowledge for good. Knowledge without wisdom can lead to disaster. As Dr. Ian Malcom, Jeff Goldblum's character in the original Jurassic Park says, "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could that they didn't stop to think if they should."

Wisdom helps us use our knowledge well. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Knowledge by itself can lead to pride and thinking higher of yourself than you ought to. What should determine the behavior of a baptized child of

God is not "knowledge about" something, but "love for" someone: If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God." Knowledge can be used wisely or foolishly, as can everything else in our lives.

The choice between wisdom and folly is stark, but we don't like to be faced with those kinds of choices. We want to follow the advice of Yogi Berra, who said "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." We don't want to be faced with the stark black and white choices of wisdom or folly, life or death, heaven or hell, salvation or damnation. We want to avoid the hard choices, leave them in tension for as long as possible. We sometimes suffer from FOMO, a fear of missing out, and know that making one choice means giving up one path, one possibility. We want to be able to make foolish choices for a bit, spreading our wings and enjoying freedom while we can, before going back to choosing wisdom after we've learned better.

But we can't avoid choosing forever. Not choosing is itself a choice. As a fake (or at least unproved) quote attributed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

Earlier in Proverbs, it tells about God creating the world but not alone. It speaks of Wisdom being the master workman at the side of God at Creation, delighting in all that was made. Early Christians saw parallels between this and the beginning of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is described in similar language. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Jesus, the Word of God, the Wisdom of God, was present and active at Creation. God the Father didn't create alone.

Community was broken when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and each other. Instead of the perfect harmony of following the ways of wisdom, the whole world was caught up in the discord of their folly. Instead of trusting in their creator, they put their faith in their own abilities, their own knowledge of good and

evil. They let their independence overshadow their dependence on their Creator.

Our sinful nature keeps pulling us to choose folly. But that's why Jesus came. Jesus, the personified wisdom of God, came down into all of our folly and foolishness. He took all of our unwise decisions, foolish actions, and took them to the cross, which seems like foolishness to those who don't believe. But that foolish act, Jesus dying on the cross, is what began to restore God's creation to the way it should be. Wisdom dying on the cross lead to the restoration of wisdom and the beginning of the end of our foolishness.

God's Wisdom has something to say about how we live. That's what the book of Proverbs, and the other similar books of wisdom literature in the Bible have to tell us. We could live self-serving lives of indulgence, debauchery and foolishness. We can gain knowledge and wealth purely for our own gain. Perhaps we might dress it up a bit and say "I have amassed much; I shall eat, drink and be merry." But the intent is the same, and so is the result.

Or perhaps instead we shall remember Whose we are and where our blessings come from. We can remind ourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that we are called to lives of infectious servant love in God. We can make the most of our time loving God and inviting others to share in the blessings we have so undeservedly received. We see God's wisdom in the world.

We also see wisdom inviting. Personified wisdom invites her guests to a lush banquet. Her invitation is open to all, but also encourages dramatic change: forsake foolishness and live! The slogan "God loves us unconditionally" is only half right. God loves us with the expectation and hope that love will transform us into believing and righteous people. Or put another way, God loves you just the way you are – but He loves you too much to leave you that way.

Following Jesus won't simplify the choices you have to make. In fact, following Jesus can make them more complicated. But we also know that we no longer have to make up for our dumb decisions, our sins, the times we foolishly choose death, on our own. We have Jesus, the wisdom of God. Jesus overcame death and the grave, so that we may have life. He promises not to

leave us alone or forsaken, but to be with us, to save us. His choice to take that path has made all the difference. Thanks be to God that He did.

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