

WISDOM?

Proverbs 9:1-10

The new school year is upon us. How interesting was our Old Testament lesson last week, which is the same at churches all over the world, most of which are not across the street from a university. It is from Proverbs and speaks to us of wisdom. As new students you may well be asking, “Am I smart enough to get through college?” Don’t think that question is limited to you. Traditionally second year students are called, “sophomores” which literally means “wise fools.” The idea behind that is that they may just think they are smart. After that you have juniors who wonder how they are ever going to be patient enough to get through college. Then there are the seniors who may not seem to care, but deep down they still wonder, “Am I smart enough?”

The book of Proverbs takes the idea of wisdom and personifies it as a woman.

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!” To him who lacks sense she says, “Come; eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

One of the most famous churches ever built is the “Hagia Sophia” in Istanbul, Turkey. “Hagia Sophia” means “Holy Wisdom” and is in the feminine. But the wisdom that Proverbs speaks of is not what we would think of across the street from the university. It is not a matter of having the right answers and all the right information. It is about how a person lives.

You would think that there would never need to be plumbers or electricians anymore, unless people just didn’t want to get dirty. Think of all the “how-to” videos there are out there. With our unfettered access to reams and reams of information, shouldn’t we be able to solve anything? Shouldn’t expertise be as easy as getting Wi-Fi?

A Polish chemist named Michael Polanyi is also a philosopher. He says, “We can know more than we can tell.” I can readily tie my shoes. But how do I explain that to others? I can put on a tie without thinking, but when my sons asked me to tie one on them, I couldn’t do it. I had to put them on myself, then loosen them, and pull it over their heads. It is so much easier for us to recognize faces than to describe them. We can have confusion when asked to say a password out loud, give directions to a familiar destination, or give clear instructions for a family recipe we know instinctively how to do.

What we know that we cannot always tell is what Scriptures refer to as “wisdom.” It is not so much what is involved in facts that lead to getting a PhD, but life experience which you can see in a grandparent. A Harvard professor was asked by the president of the institution to do a thorough study of new students and what helped them do well in school and later in life. The result of his study was this advice to those students—“Get to know an adult each semester.” It didn’t have to be a professor. It could be a janitor, a cook, someone you work with at a job, or someone you visit in a care facility. These are people who would impart to you not information, but wisdom.

A semester ago when everything was online at Iowa State a record percentage of the student body made the Dean’s lists. Due to the stress from the pandemic professors didn’t have as high a standard as they normally do. But it was also the fact that they were limited by having no face-to-face contact, the education was more centered on information and less on “how to do.” What they were missing was “wisdom.” Our second lesson from Ephesians says, “Walk as children of light.” Notice it doesn’t say, “Learn what light is,” but “Walk in the light.”

For years at the New York Yankees spring training camp in Tampa, Florida this scene took place. An ex-pitcher nicknamed “Gator” drove to the airport to pick up a small, bent over man named “Yogi.” He took him to the local hotel, and each day took him to and from the training center. The pitcher was star pitcher Ron Guidry, and the old man was Yogi Berra. Though Berra’s son is older than Guidry, they were the closest of friends. This happened because of what Guidry continued to learn from Berra. No one would call Berra a genius. He was famous for saying at a Yankees old timer’s game when they showed pictures of ex-players who died, “I hope I never see my face up there,” or when at an event honoring him, “I want to thank everyone for making this day necessary.” But when it came to baseball and life Berra had wisdom. It was a wisdom Guidry gained from him not so much by picking up information from him, but in his playing days imitating the way Berra did things and later from just being with him. This happened even though Guidry was a pitcher and Berra a catcher.

God wants us to have wisdom. He wants us to have more than information, the facts straight, but what we can learn from imitating and experiencing. That is why Proverbs says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” God doesn’t just want us to have the facts right like knowing that Jesus came into this world to die on the cross and rise for us. He wants us to live in His wisdom.

That is why we are encouraged to come to worship. Proverbs compares what God offers to us to the invitation to a feast:

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, “Whoever is simple, let

him turn in here!” To him who lacks sense she says, “Come; eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

In worship we hear God’s Word, receive forgiveness in our confession of sins, partake of Jesus’ true body and blood in Holy Communion, and join with other members of the body of Christ. We do this not so much to receive information—knowledge—but to gain wisdom, experience with God. That is why we want students to know the importance of the wisdom you can get from regularly joining with other Christians for worship. That is why we encourage you to come again and again to this church.