

Hear the Call of Wisdom; Sound the Call of Wisdom

Pastor Nathan Ericson • Proverbs 9:1-18

¹ Wisdom has built her house;

she has hewn out its seven pillars.

² She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.

³ She has sent out her maids, and she calls
from the highest point of the city. . . .

¹³ The woman Folly is loud;

she is undisciplined and without knowledge.

¹⁴ She sits at the door of her house,
on a seat at the highest point of the city,

¹⁵ calling out to those who pass by,
who go straight on their way.

Perhaps you noticed that our text for today is about a topic very familiar to residents of the Fond du Lac area, a topic very familiar at least this week. Proverbs chapter 9 speaks about building houses. Two houses, to be specific: one is the house of wisdom and the other is the house of folly. The question for us today is this: What kind of house are you building for yourself? And what kind of house do we want to build for others as we do an extreme makeover of their lives with the life-changing good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen? Are we building a house of wisdom or a house of folly? We want to build a house of wisdom for ourselves. And, as you have invited me here today as your campus minister at UW-Oshkosh, we also want to consider how it is our strong desire to build a house of wisdom for our young people and for all people to whom we bring the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today from the great wisdom chapter of the Bible, Proverbs 9, we learn to hear God's call of wisdom as we build a house of wisdom for ourselves, and then to sound out God's call of wisdom as we build a house of wisdom for those around us.

What is wisdom? Is it academic knowledge, the kind of things you learn on a college campus? Is it scientific knowledge, finding out how things in our world truly work? Or is it the knowledge of experience, the wisdom that comes with age? I suppose all of those are part of what our world calls *wisdom*. But what about God's wisdom? How would you define true, spiritual wisdom from God? Isn't part of true, spiritual wisdom the ability to view other kinds of wisdom from the proper perspective? Isn't part of true, spiritual wisdom the ability to hear God's voice even when many other voices are calling out to us? By faith, that's what we do. We listen to our Savior's voice; we listen to the voice of true wisdom. That's also how our text begins, with wisdom herself speaking to us. Wisdom is pictured as a house in which we might dwell, a house of learning, and this learning in turn is pictured as a rich feast that gives us life. Listen to her speak:

⁴ "Let all who are simple come in here!"
she says to those who lack judgment.

⁵ "Come, eat my food
and drink the wine I have mixed.

⁶ Leave your simple ways and you will live;
walk in the way of understanding.

Dear friends, hear the call of wisdom. Would anyone need to say that on their own they are spiritually simple minded? God promises to take the simple mind and give it the depth of true spiritual knowledge. Must anyone admit that on their own they

sometimes exercise poor spiritual judgment and choose foolish and sinful things? God promises to give discretion to those who lack judgment. Do we also need to admit that on their own in this world we would be wandering down the path that leads to death and destruction? God promises to give life, to take us off the path that leads to death and destruction and place us on the path of life, the path of walking in a true understanding of his ways.

As wisdom calls out to us with her invitation, we have God's promise to grant wisdom to those who hear. That invitation and that promise are for me and for you as members of this congregation. We have the Word of God before us in our worship, in our Bible studies, in our group devotions, in our Sunday school and day school. What's more, as Lutheran Christians, we say that we are willing to listen to that Word and to hear what it has to say to us without trying to impose our wisdom on the Word, as if we could judge what God has to say. That's the foundation of why Lutherans gather together as a congregation: we want to hear the wisdom that comes from God. We want to grow in it. You know what? That's exactly what God promises to do for us as he prepares the meat and mixes the wine, as he sets the table for us to feast on the truth, to grow in faith and understanding, and to obtain the eternal gifts that are ours through the life and death of Christ.

That invitation and that promise of spiritual wisdom from God are also for our college students as they immerse themselves each year in the wisdom of this world. Isn't it amazing to think of the scientific wisdom God allows us to explore at our universities and in other places? My father is a research scientist in the Twin Cities; every day he uses amazing instruments to study chemical and physical reactions that take place on a molecular level, things we only dreamed of seeing a generation ago. Or think of modern studies in molecular biology that take place on the UW-Oshkosh campus and elsewhere. Each day we understand more intricate details of the life that God has created. With all this comes an invitation from God to see *his* wisdom in all that he has made, to acknowledge *him* as the source of all wisdom, and to go beyond the physical reality to see spiritual reality as well. God invites us with his Word to know him by faith, to confess our sins, and to receive forgiveness through his Son. That's what we hold out to our college students through our campus ministry: that yes, worldly wisdom is important, but that this is also a time more than ever before in their lives to grow in the true, spiritual wisdom that God promises to give.

Unfortunately, in the midst of true wisdom's call, there is also another voice. It's a voice that sounds equally appealing. It's a voice that also promises great reward. But this voice only masquerades as true wisdom. This voice is the voice of folly. In Proverbs 9, she also calls out. Her house, though, is not the strong fortress of wisdom. This house lacks discipline. This house lacks true knowledge. Listen to her cry:

¹⁶ "Let all who are simple come in here!"
she says to those who lack judgment.

¹⁷ "Stolen water is sweet;
food eaten in secret is delicious!"

¹⁸ But little do they know that the dead are there,
that her guests are in the depths of the grave.

Do you see the contrast? Wisdom says, “Leave your simple ways and you will live.” Folly, on the other hand, doesn’t say *anything* nothing about our eternal destiny. That’s because eternity is something Folly wants to hide. Instead Folly points us to the pleasures of this life. It’s left for the writer of the proverbs to warn those who listen to Folly, “Little do they know...that her guests are in the depths of the grave.”

In this fallen world, it’s inevitable that we are going to hear the voice of folly. It’s out there, calling loud and clear. Not that we’re defenseless; we can rightly say that with God’s call of wisdom, we are able know the truth and distinguish between spiritual wisdom and spiritual folly. But the problem comes at those times when we not only hear the voice of folly but also listen to it and follow in its ways. To many times her words appeal to us and lead us astray: “Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!” Isn’t that the way temptation works? Yes it’s wrong, but it could be so fun, so advantageous to me, so inconsequential as long as God doesn’t know. But God’s does know; his words are stern: “Little do they know.” Little do they know that those who live in folly’s house are as good as dead—dead in this world and dead in the life to come.

That’s a voice that each of us has listened to in our life. We have plugged our ears to the voice of wisdom and opened our eyes to all that folly has to offer. We have stepped off the path that leads to life and trotted down the path that leads to destruction. We have laid down the Word of God and the true wisdom it contains and lifted up the book of science, lifted up the book of academia, lifted up even the book of experience and arrogantly said to God, “I will engross myself in the wisdom of fallen creation rather than the wisdom of my perfect Creator.” Why do we say that? It’s because our sinful nature also says to God, “I’m so wise. I know better than you. You can’t tell me what to think or do.” Self-centeredness. That’s what guides our world. And that thinking can sometimes affect even the heart of a Christian if we follow our old sinful self, bump God off this throne, and put the crown on our own head, the scepter in our own hand.

The temptation to listen to the voice of folly is an area where it is appropriate to have special concern for our young people—our high school students and especially our college students who have left the shelter of home. One temptation for them is to forsake the wisdom of God for the wisdom of this world, to place more importance on academics and achievement than on the knowledge that lasts beyond this life. Another temptation is to listen to the folly of the theory of evolution which rules on our campuses and seeks to dethrone our creator God. A third temptation is to live in the debauchery of the world and to sink under a guilty conscience after drinking/using/doing the things that folly says are fun to drink/use/do—all in the name of serving the almighty self, the omnipotent I.

Maybe we need to go back to the beginning. Maybe we need to step away from this fast-spinning world and let its dizzy concerns leave our head. Maybe it’s time to see things from God’s perspective. What is the beginning of true wisdom? The writer of the proverbs explains.

¹⁰ “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

¹¹ For through me your days will be many,

and years will be added to your life.

¹² If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”

Dear friends, that’s where wisdom begins, with the fear of the Lord, with the knowledge we find in his Word. Listen to the call of wisdom. Here in the Word you have the solid foundation on which to build. Here you have the foundation of Jesus Christ. Here you have what makes our hearts secure: that Jesus carried our sins on his back to the cross and declared us innocent of guilt even though we aren’t; that Jesus lived under God’s law for us and declared us righteous even when we weren’t. Jesus Christ is the wisdom and power of God. What a wise God, what a loving God, who worked out our salvation for us. What a wise God, what a loving God, who keeps calling out to us with his voice, the voice of wisdom.

Dear friends, will you recommit yourselves with me to hearing God’s call of wisdom? Recommit yourself to being in God’s Word. Recommit yourself to proclaiming God’s praises in the assembly of his people. Recommit yourself to involve your children every step of the way that they may also hear the voice of wisdom and grow in God’s wisdom. And today, will you commit yourself to one other thing as well? God invites you not only to hear the call of wisdom, but also to sound the call of wisdom and share his wisdom with those around you.

Dear friends, sound the call of wisdom, just as the writer of the proverbs invites us. He speaks of correcting, rebuking, and instructing as we share the wisdom of God. And he speaks of what will happen as we do so:

⁷ “Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.

⁸ Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

⁹ Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.

Wait a second, you might say. Not all of those reactions sound good. Correcting a mocker invites insult in return? Rebuking a wicked man incurs abuse and hate? Yes, that’s exactly what happens. That’s what happens when we proclaim the Word of God. But God knows this will happen, because his Word is powerful, his Word works, his Word cuts through the heart by the power of his Spirit. But here is the key: his Word, even as it leads some to insult us, also brings great reward to many others. Instruct a wise man and he will love you. Instruct him and he will be wiser still. Teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. That’s the blessed result of sounding out God’s call of wisdom. That’s why God invites us also to...

Sound the call of wisdom. Fathers and husbands, do that for your family as you lead them in God’s Word. Mothers, teach your children with the wisdom of their Savior Jesus. Members, sound the call of wisdom to people in your community who do not know that wisdom of God. And all of us, let’s join in caring for our young people at home and away who take tender steps in a world full of folly. Let’s build a house of wisdom for them to come home to wherever our children go in this world. God calls to us with his wisdom, and he promises to make us grow in wisdom as we share his Word. Sound out his wisdom to one another.