

The Second Sunday After Christmas – 2021

1 Kings 3:4-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

Luke 2:40-52

Wisdom is portrayed in the book of Proverbs as an alluring woman. Sophia is her name. Wisdom is empowering in a way that nothing else can be. Wisdom is indiscriminate in her call – she beckons *all* unto herself. Folly is also portrayed as a woman in the book of Proverbs. She too has her enticements. Folly is an adulteress, binding men to self, binding men to foolishness and waste.

The picture language in the book of Proverbs is a stunningly accurate portrayal of reality, and it has gone begging in our late age. Wit and wisdom are little seen in our culture. Men no longer pursue wisdom as a prized bride. Women no longer pursue wisdom with the desire to fulfill their own character, as the delightful pursuit of their own extraordinary potential.

Solomon sounds a note that is well heard as we begin a new year. “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit is better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed” (Proverbs 3:13-18). That is beautiful and deep and true.

There is an inscription on the Gate to Harvard Yard. It reads: “Enter to grow in wisdom. Depart to better serve thy country and mankind.” That is a magnificent sentiment. It captures well the essence of learning and that genuine wisdom takes the posture of service. When Harvard was established in 1636 it was understood that the pursuit of wisdom was the calling of man. Wisdom calls to the spirit and the heart and it elevates our condition. A man named Thomas Shepherd wrote a letter to his 16-year-old son who was about to enter Harvard University – the year was 1672. It is a letter of fatherly tenderness. It is a letter that places a high value on wisdom. It is a letter that intentionally leads his son – with practical direction – to wisdom’s holy embrace. Here is a snippet: “Remember, therefore, that God looks for and calls for much holiness from you: I had rather see you buried in your grave, than grow light, loose, wanton or profane. God’s secrets in the Holy Scriptures, which are left to instruct ministers, are never made known to common and profane spirits: and therefore, be sure you begin, and end every Day wherein you study with earnest prayer to God, lamenting after the favor of God; reading some part of the Scriptures daily; and setting apart some time every day (though but one quarter of an hour) for meditation on the things of God.”

From what I can tell, Harvard has certainly changed in the last 350 years. Wisdom has been divorced from the Scriptures, divorced from the things of God. The enticements of radical humanism dominate higher education. It is an adulterous spirit. It is the voice of folly that can be heard in Harvard Yard. In the year 360, a basilica was built in Constantinople. It was named Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom). The full name of the basilica was “Church of the Holy Wisdom of God.” It was dedicated to the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Logos, on December

25<sup>th</sup>. It was a center of worship, and learning, and the pursuit of wisdom; namely, the pursuit of the knowledge of Christ. The Hagia Sophia was a towering accomplishment of architecture and art. It was the largest cathedral for over a thousand years. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May in the year 1453 Constantinople was sacked by Muslims and the basilica became a mosque. Wisdom was extinguished in that place. The Christian art, mosaic treasures, were plastered over.

Wisdom is in danger of being plastered over in our era; plastered over with Facebook and Twitter and ESPN and Bud Lite. Our appetites are carnal. Our preoccupations are empty, profiting neither mind nor soul. For us, Proverbs has a warning: “The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to people who pass by, who are going straight on their way, ‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’ And to him who lacks sense she says, ‘Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’ But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol” (Proverbs 9:13-18).

**The priceless art of your soul must not be plastered over... with anything.** None of us, not a single one of us is immune to the foolishness of vain living. All of us, every single one of us has been entrusted with invaluable treasure. To squander it in pursuit of entertaining yourself to death is a stairwell to eternal bitterness. Wisdom calls to you: “Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:34-36).

There was the twelve-year-old Christ, incarnate wisdom, speaking with the learned men of Israel in the house of God, the Temple. God’s Word – that was their topic. What had God said? What had God promised? What had God done? It was the time of Passover. It was at the time when the people of Israel commemorated their Exodus from the land of Egypt. Blood and death, slavery and deliverance were all painted on the Mosaic of Salvation History, painted artfully in God’s Word. **The Messiah would fulfill this history.** The Christ would come and deliver His people. Jerusalem would be the place. The One who would be the new and greater Temple would come to Jerusalem and unleash His power. Blood and death, slavery and deliverance would all be revealed in a cross and an empty tomb. God had promised it. The Scriptures announced it. The wise looked for it for the wise knew that God would do it.

With His mother, Jesus is somewhat perplexed. “Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know where I would be?” It is so obvious to Jesus. Why was it not obvious to her? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? Do *you* know where to find Him? Do you know where He has promised to be? The wise know and act accordingly. Whoever finds Christ finds life. He still **must be** in His Father’s house. Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? Let’s extend this. Did you not know that I must be on my cross? Did you not know that I must be in a garden tomb? Did you not know that I must rise on the third day? Did you not know that I must be in the bread and wine of Holy Communion? Did you not know that I must be in the Word, in My church, in the water of Holy Baptism?

Ultimately, this is an Easter story. Wisdom tells us that this is an Easter story. Whoever finds the resurrected Christ finds wisdom. **This account in Luke’s Gospel is a story about the**

**perpetual Easter we receive when we are in His presence.** Remember, Luke identifies being lost with being dead and being found with being made alive. Once that simple notion is put in place the whole story opens up and breathes Easter's holy air into our foolish lungs. Jesus was lost, and then He was found. It all takes place in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. At Passover, the Paschal Lamb had to be sacrificed at the Temple in remembrance of the Exodus when the blood of the lamb guarded all the firstborn of Israel against death. Those looking for Jesus didn't find Him until the third day. Didn't you know I had to rise from the dead? "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5).

We are a people of the resurrection. The Lord Christ is our Teacher. He leads us into the wisdom of God. That resurrection, that wisdom has been breathed into you by God's Word for "we preach Christ and Him crucified – the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, savored and celebrated, there is a Hagia Sophia, there is the church of the Holy Wisdom of God. Of that place it is *truly* said: "Enter to grow in wisdom (grow in Christ). Depart to better serve thy country and mankind."