

13th Sunday after Pentecost
August 22, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Proverbs 9:1-6
Wisdom's Invitation

Proverbs 9:1–6 (NIV84)

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. 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 in Christ,

At the state and county fairs as well as at many amusement parks, there will be a midway area filled with all kinds of games. Just toss a ring onto a bottle and win a prize. Knock down the bottles with the softball and win a prize. Of course, you have to pay for each try to knock down the bottles or toss the rings. The game attendants invite you to play and tell you how easy it is to win. The game looks fun. The top prize is a teddy bear bigger than yourself. The game looks easy so you give it a try. And most people learn that the game is not nearly as easy as it looks. There is a reason they can give away big top prizes. Almost no one wins the top prize. I'm sure someone will come up to me today and show a picture of themselves with a giant stuffed animal. However, I will still maintain that playing games in the midway is not a wise way to get what you want or need in life. Though it might be fun, it would be a foolish way to live.

In Proverbs 9, Solomon sets before us invitations from two women. One woman is Wisdom personified. The other is Folly personified. Our text covers wisdom but we will bring in folly to compare these invitations. The invitations are to the same group of people, all people. But the invitations diverge at this point. For one is an invitation to repent while the other is an invitation to sin. One is an invitation to life and the other is an invitation to death. Thanks to the Lord God that he has given us Wisdom's invitation.

An Invitation to All People

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.

You can almost picture the house of Wisdom in your head. It has seven beautiful pillars. The banquet is being carefully prepared with the best food and wine. Even the table is carefully set. And now the invitations go out. Wisdom sends some with her maids and invites others with her voice. We see God's invitation to his kingdom of grace in Wisdom's invitation. God sent out his prophets and apostles with the message of the Christ, promised in the Old Testament and fulfilled through Jesus in the New. God is not hiding his invitation to his heavenly banquet. In Proverbs, the woman calls from the highest point of the city. This invitation is for all people.

The problem for us is that Folly is also inviting the same people to her house.

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.

Everyone is faced with the same two invitations, one wise and the other foolish. Both invitations are proclaimed from the highest point in the city. There is no way to distinguish between the call to a wise life and a foolish one based on the popularity of the invitation. There are many ideas in the public square that may be advocated with loud voices and be popular ways of thinking that are foolish and there may be some that are wise. We do not judge by the popularity of the idea but only by God's Word. This is difficult since Folly's invitation surrounds us just as much as Wisdom's.

An Invitation to Repent

In addition, both address their invitations to the same people: *"Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment.*

Of course Folly targets those lacking in judgment. They are easier to deceive. The simple are easier to control. But Wisdom's invitation also targets those lacking in judgment, the simple. Folly targets those who are easy targets to destroy. The Lord goes after the simple because we need to be saved. Yes, we are all the simple. Every human (except Jesus) is lacking judgment. We may not like to think of ourselves as simple and needing help but only when we realize this are we able to receive the benefits of Wisdom's invitation.

This invitation is an invitation to repent. *"Leave your simple ways."* Who would accept an invitation to a party that tells those invited about the wonderful food to be served and that you need to change almost everything about your life? An intervention is sometimes arranged when a loved one is struggling with addiction. Family and friends gather together and invite the one struggling to confront him or her and help them overcome the addiction. But you don't tell the person about the intervention on the invitation because most would not attend. God tells us there is something wrong with us and we need to leave our simple ways. Change is painful.

Folly's invitation sounds so much easier and better! *"Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!"* Her invitation is not to leave our sinful ways, but to double down on sin, to sin in secret and exciting ways. This is Satan's temptation to Eve. He tells her that God is keeping something good from her, that when she eats of the forbidden fruit her eyes will be open and she will know good and evil, just like God. Eve knew that God had forbidden it but she still ate the fruit. Getting away with sin can be exciting and a rush of adrenaline as we "get away with it." A shoplifter may pocket items just for the thrill of getting away with it. The teen may just drink alcohol because the government and their parents forbid it. We might watch something on our phones because no one else will know. We might engage in some juicy gossip because it is a thrill to hear about how someone else is getting away with living a godless life. Someone might commit adultery before married or while married for the excitement of keeping a secret and doing what is forbidden. *"Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!"* promises Folly. And we fall for her lies again and again.

Those who enter Folly's house are in for a surprise. They are promised thrills and excitement in life. Sin can provide some of that for a short time. But this is what all who pursue a life of sin will find in Folly's house: *Little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave.* Eternal death is the destiny of all who pursue sin instead of heeding the call of Wisdom to repent.

An Invitation to Life

My fellow simple, judgment lacking friends – repent and live is Christ's invitation to us.

“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.”

Through Christ, we have life eternal and a new way of living now. Our life day to day is to walk in the way of understanding. We understand who we are, that we are simple minded sinners who daily need Christ's forgiveness. We understand that Jesus did everything needed to secure our forgiveness through his perfect life and innocent suffering and death. We live each day as a sinner who has been and will be forgiven. In the middle of Proverbs 9, just after the selection in our reading today, Solomon sums up our new life in Christ. *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).* The wise life is knowing Christ and what he had done and will do for us. The wise life is trusting our Lord and Savior for eternal life and all we need now. The wise life is lived through faith in the One who gave himself for us.

The woman Wisdom invited all to a wonderful banquet of food and wine. One day we will partake of the heavenly banquet with our Savior forever. Until then, our Savior invites us to receive his spiritual blessings with thanksgiving each day. So we receive his comfort in an email devotion at the end of a tough day. We receive some spiritual understanding of God's grace and mercy in a daily Bible reading before a challenging day. We receive his forgiveness and the power to forgive our loved one in a reading from Sunday. We are reminded of Christ's unfailing love through a hymn that is stuck in our heads (a good thing). And we receive a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in the bread and wine, the body and blood, of Holy Communion that unites us with Christ and with all believers in heaven and on earth.

Until we reach heaven, the woman Folly will continue to invite us to return to a pursuit of sinful pleasure and excitement. Though we know better, we will try to play the game and get away with it at times. Thanks be to our God that Jesus continually invites us back to his home, the home of wisdom, the place of repentance and life. The spiritually wise among us are not those who never fall into sin, but instead those who continually repent and live.

Amen.