

September 29, 2019
16th Sunday after Pentecost
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
The Beginning of Wisdom

Proverbs 9:8–12 (NIV84)

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. 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 in Christ,

I was out of the house, refinishing a piece of furniture when I started feeling a little bad. So I came inside. My side or stomach was hurting so I laid down for a little while. I tried to eat something soothing to my stomach and the pain persisted, getting worse. But, of course, the pain will go away if I just get some rest and maybe take a Tylenol or two. My wise wife thought it might be a good idea to go to see a doctor. But, no, if I just rest for a while, the pain will go away. The pain did not go away. And doubled over in pain, I finally consented to having my wife drive me to the hospital. After the cause of my pain was diagnosed, my wife again took me by car to another hospital where there was a surgeon waiting to remove a very sick appendix. I felt much better when I woke up from surgery. But that pain was not going to go away without some serious help. It would have been foolish for me to try to sleep off the pain of a soon to burst appendix. Listening to the wise and gentle rebuke of my wife to go to the hospital was a very great blessing.

Have you ever been too stubborn to go the doctor or too stubborn to listen to the wisdom of your spouse or parents? In the section of Proverbs before us today, the Lord promises blessings to the wise person. So where does godly wisdom begin. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

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

The mocker is the person who thinks that they know it all. Since they think that they have all wisdom and knowledge, they get angry with anyone who dares to give them advice. They hate the person who goes beyond advice to rebuking them. So the response to being rebuked is to mock the person who dares to rebuke them. It happens in politics as name calling and mockery takes the place of actual debate and discussion. I’ve unfortunately seen it in Lutheran discussion groups online. Some asks a simple question or challenges someone’s statement and the respond is sarcasm, which never works well in writing, or in something like, “You must not be a Lutheran.” I’ve been very tempted to reply in the discussion group and rebuke those who write such rude responses. But rebuke and mocker and he will hate you. Some people, especially online, are just looking for an argument and I am not going to participate in that.

But let’s turn the tables and instead of being the one doing the rebuking, we are the ones being rebuked. How do you respond when someone tells you about your failures, weaknesses and sins? The teacher points out the mistakes in your homework. You can either think that the teacher is dumb or think that the teacher is trying to help you be a better student. The boss or a coworker point out your careless mistakes

in a project. You can either complain to your friends about how picky and arrogant and bossy they are to make you stay late and do the project the right way or you can tell them “Thank you” for helping to get the job done right. And, don’t raise your hands for this, how many of you come to church hoping that the pastor will rebuke you for the sin you had the most problem with this week? “I really hope the Bible readings rebuke me for my lust and anger.” “I’m really looking forward to hearing about my materialism and greed.” “I can’t wait for the law to convict me and show me that I deserve hell for my sins against God and my neighbors.”

Rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

Do you love the pastor, the parent, the friend, the child who rebukes you for your sin? We want to defend ourselves. We want to lash out at the person rebuking us. We want to dig up all of their sins and throw the faults and failures in their face. Our sinful nature wants to mock. But the wise person loves the one who rebukes them. But this is difficult. In fact, it is impossible to have such a humble attitude without the proper beginning.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

The first step in becoming wise is the fear of the Lord. Then we can move on to the wisdom of loving the person who rebukes us. But the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. So what is the fear of the Lord?

It is to know who the Lord is. In catechism class we just learned the three “omni” words that describe God’s attributes. He is omnipresent, that is, God is present everywhere. You cannot hide from God. You cannot escape the Lord. Our God is also omnipotent. That is, he is all powerful, almighty. The Lord can control the weather and direct the futures of great nations to suit his purposes. Nothing is impossible for him. And finally, the Lord God is omniscience. He has all science, that is, all knowledge. He knows the present as well as the past and the future. He knows the inner workings of the atom and the size of the most distant stars. He knows the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts.

To know the omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient God is to fear him. For he knows our sins. We cannot hide from him and he has all the power to destroy those who rebel against him. This fear is terror of God. This is the only fear of God our sinful nature can have.

However, we who have been given faith in Christ, fear God in a different way as well. For in Christ, we see the Lord who is present everywhere, humble himself to be present in the person of Jesus Christ. God came in the flesh to dwell among sinful people in order to save sinful people by his own flesh and blood. In Christ, we see the Lord who is all powerful, humble himself before kings and rulers in order to be sentenced to death. The almighty Son of God is nailed to a cross to pay for our failures to heed God’s rebukes. In Christ, the God who knows all things, went willingly to suffer and die a death he knew was coming. The God who knows all of our sins went willingly to pay for each of them. Think about that for a moment. Sometimes we might be tempted to think something like: “If Jesus had known about this terrible sin or that horrible string of sins, he might have thought twice about dying for me.” But Jesus did know about that terrible sin and every horrible string of sins and he went to the cross for you.

To fear the Lord Jesus Christ is to love him, to honor him, to respect him and to listen to him. In our new

self, we need not be terrified of the Lord, but instead we rejoice to hear him. We even love to hear his rebuke for we know that he only wants us to repent and receive the forgiveness he has already accomplished at the cross. He only wants what is best for us now and forever.

Solomon connects being a wise person with being a righteous person through his poetry:

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

We are only righteous before God through Christ. And we are only wise through faith in Christ. Paul tells us how we become wise for salvation: From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15). The holy Scriptures make us wise for salvation, give us faith in Christ, and continue to give us wisdom that leads to eternal life. So what does a wise and righteous person do? We continue in the Bible. We continue to learn about our God.

The fear of the Lord is only the beginning of wisdom, not the end. Jesus loves me this I know is a wonderful faith but is not all we want to know about our Savior. We want to know what the Lord who saved us is like. He reveals his attributes in his Word. We want to know what he thinks and what his will is. He reveals part of his thoughts and will in the Bible. We want to know how to respond to situations in life and how to act wisely as a child of God. He tells us his law. He gives us many examples of people in the Bible, some of whom are examples to follow and others examples of what not to do. The more we know the Bible, the more we will know the righteousness Christ has won for us and the more wise we will be for salvation as well as for every day life. Therefore, we continue to ask our Lord to teach us so that we can add to our learning.

God promises this blessing to those who wisely listen to him:

For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.

The believer who is wise and listens to the Lord may live a longer life on this earth. There are many ways our life can be cut short by sinful living so avoiding a sinful pattern of life can add days and years to your life. But only the Lord knows the number of days we have on this earth. His promise extends beyond the days of life on earth. He will add days and years without end to the life of all who are wise in Christ. For all who repent and believe in Christ have Christ's righteousness and will live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Amen.