

Proper 15

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August 17, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and ever-living God, you have given great and precious promises to those who believe. Grant us the perfect faith which overcomes all doubts, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Proverbs 9:1-6

{1} Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. {2} She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. {3} She has sent out her servant girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, {4} "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says, {5} "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. {6} Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

1. Wisdom: Wisdom personified has prepared her house and a feast for the simple and foolish.

seven pillars: "The number 'seven' had originally ominous or sacred associations, but its use later became simply a favorite literary convention for a small number." [1]

5. Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed: This passage used in context with the Gospel for the day leads to the assumption that in John 6 Jesus is talking about his flesh and blood in the Eucharist. Very few commentators would agree with this forced interpretation. However, without interpreting the gospel eucharistically, it is still possible to understand that Jesus' offer of his flesh and blood, like the banquet Wisdom prepared, leads to a new kind of life.

6. Lay aside immaturity and live, and walk in the way of insight: The goal of wisdom is maturity, insight, and life.

Psalms 34:9-14

{9} O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want. {10} The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. {11} Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. {12} Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good? {13} Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. {14} Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

The Psalm this Sunday is a continuation of the Psalm from last Sunday.

9. his holy ones: "[*qedoshaow*]", according to M. Noth, refers to human beings only in this passage in the OT," elsewhere it would refer to heavenly creatures. [2]

9-10. those who fear him have no want...lack no good thing: Those who fear the Lord lack nothing that is good.

11. the fear of the Lord: It is defined as not speaking evil or deceit, but rather doing good and seeking "peace." Peace is not the absence of conflict, but rather a positive relationship with others in the community.

Ephesians 5:15-20

{15} Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, {16} making the most of the time, because the days are evil. {17} So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. {18} Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, {19} as you sing psalms

and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, {20} giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5 introduces a quotation which leads to a discussion of the proper conduct of those who are loved by Christ.

15. Be careful then how you live: This introduces a summary of Paul's admonitions for a life "proper for saints."

not as unwise people, but as wise: ".Not because of an ideal placed before them, but on the ground of their election, vocation, exaltation by God (1:4ff.; 2:1ff.; 4:1ff.), and because of the forgiveness and unity imparted to them by the crucified Christ (1:7; 2:13ff., finally as men sealed and motivated by the Spirit (1:14; 2:18, etc.), they are equipped to 'conduct themselves...as wise men.' Paul's ethic is built upon the 'mercies of God' (Rom 12:1), upon 'Christonomy' (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2), and upon the Spirit's manifestation and guidance (Rom 8; Gal 5), not upon the rule of absolute virtues or the autonomy of the wise. In God's name the saints are admonished to walk wisely." [3]

16. the days are evil: "...the logic of this sentence corresponds to that of Gen 8:21: 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.' ...They [the saints] are neither a lost nor a doomed generation, but shall 'stand' as witnesses to the victory of God's light over darkness. The present days may be called 'evil' because of the moral evil abounding in them (cf. Rom 7:14ff.).... The realized eschatology preached in this epistle includes a realistic appraisal of the 'evil' time of temptation and persecution, but the same eschatology does not permit any judgments or lamentations of a dualistic or fatalistic world view.... Both (current sufferings and final tribulations) are embraced by the anticipation and ultimate fulfillment of redemption from all evil." [4]

17. do not be foolish: The Greek word *aphron* can describe either an motionless and senseless statue, or a wild, crazed person. The admonition not to be foolish urges sober, quiet, considered responses to the demands of the times.

understand...the will of the Lord: The force of this "understanding" is to be open to the Spirit, and to be submissive to the will of God.

18. Do not get drunk with wine: Spiritual possession must, in some cases, resemble drunkenness. For example, at Pentecost Christians were accused of being "filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13-15). See also Isaiah 28:7-10 for the drunkenness of priest and prophet. The gift of wine is not to be abused. Rather to be filled with the Spirit is the will of the Lord.

19-20: Praising God through music, and giving thanks in the name of Christ are set in opposition to the unwise behavior of verse 18.

John 6:51-58

{51} I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." {52} The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" {53} So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. {54} Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; {55} for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. {56} Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. {57} Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. {58} This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

Verse 51 was the last verse of the Gospel last Sunday. Verses 56-58 are included in the Gospel for Proper 16, only 52-55 are unique to this Sunday.

51. *living bread*: Living water is running, moving water in contrast to still, stagnant water. Likewise, living bread is made from dough that is "yeasty," and full of action.

52. *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?* The question takes Jesus' words very literally and operates at a couple of levels: 1) how can anyone offer his own flesh to be eaten by another; 2) how can anyone who represents God offer something that God expressly forbids, that is human flesh and blood. What Jesus' opponents fail to grasp is that Jesus' words reflect the mystery of the relationship that Jesus creates with his followers.

53. *Very truly, I tell you*: "The formula means something like, 'I give you my word of honor.' In effect it is an oath, explicitly and publicly giving one's word of honor concerning the veracity of what one is saying." [5]

eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood: "Jesus' insistence...that Israelites eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have the life that befits children of God is antilanguage at its most obvious. [6] The context is entirely different from that of the Synoptic Last Supper, at which Jesus offers bread and wine as his body and blood (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25....). The use of the phrase 'flesh and blood' derives from two different social contexts. One context refers the phrase to human beings as created, while the other refers to animals, especially those used in sacrifice.... Relative to human beings, 'flesh and blood' pertains to the human being in general (Gal. 1:16; Heb. 2:14), specifically as a created, hence perishable, entity.... Relative to animals, the phrase is used to make proper distinctions concerning what is edible by human beings.... edible meat derives only from temple sacrifice.... all human beings, regardless of ethnic origin, are prohibited by God from eating flesh with blood.... The reference to Jesus' flesh and blood as the source of eternal life is best explained in terms of Israel's tradition of fat and blood as the source of life. In quite antisocietal fashion, Jesus urges upon his followers what has been prohibited as food to humans from the time of Noah, and even, a fortiori, what is truly cannibalistic.... To ingest Jesus' flesh and blood is synonymous with welcoming, accepting, receiving, believing in, and the like. Given the sacrificial context of fat/flesh and blood, the nuance here is accepting Jesus even in spite of his being 'lifted up' and 'glorified' on the cross.... Blood is the seat of life.... It is through ingesting Jesus' flesh and blood, through accepting and welcoming Jesus as the Word become Israelite human, crucified as 'king of the Judeans' that those who believe in Jesus have their life as children of God." [7] The Word of God became "flesh," and now we must eat the flesh of that Word, which Jesus has given as bread for the world.

55. *true food...true drink*: Jesus' flesh and blood have real value as food and drink for eternal life.

56. *those who eat...and drink...abide in me*: "...eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus creates the kind of dyadic, collectivist relationship with him that brings eternal life." [8]

Reflection

The lessons use the terminology of ordinary, earthly life to talk about the life of one who has been loved and called by Christ. Wisdom is one such category. In ordinary life we seek to live wisely, so that we may fully enjoy the potentials of life. The believer is also admonished to live wisely, but the wisdom of the Christian life is to live in the gracious love of God expressed in Christ. It is not dependent on our achievement, but upon God's gracious acts.

We cultivate relationships in our ordinary lives. These relationships, for the most part, are based on a parity, so that both parties bring to the relationship something the other needs or desires, or something that will please the other. When our relationships become one-sided, with one person taking and never giving we consider that relationship unhealthy. Our relationship with God, however, is the classic one-sided relationship. It is created and

sustained by God alone. We bring nothing to it that God needs or desires from us, nothing that can please him. In the Gospel we are urged to "eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood." Christ has given himself up for us, and our relationship with him is based on his willingness to be consumed for us.

Even the idea of proper conduct undergoes a change when it is used to describe the conduct of the Spirit-filled person. It is neither conformity to a norm, nor within our capacity to conduct ourselves wisely. Even our conduct is a gift from God through the Spirit.

Finally, the evilness of the days is not a cry for improvement, not a warning of doom, but a description of the reality into which Christ has come to bring life and light, healing and justice, grace and forgiveness. Already Christ's righteousness and grace are apart of our days.

Hymns [\[9\]](#)

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

356 --E--O Jesus, Joy
227 --D--How Blest Are
532 --P--How Great Thou
555 --II--When in Our
557 --II--Let All Things
790 --II--Praise to You
802 --II--When in Our Music

223 --G--In the Quiet
709v --G--Eat this Bread
702v --G--I Am the Bread (762s)
700v --G--I Received (761s)
701v --G--What Feast of Love
780s, 197, 207

Prayers of the People [\[10\]](#)

God of bread and wine, we praise and thank you for the precious gift of the living bread, Jesus Christ. Give us wisdom, as you gave it to Solomon and others whose stories we read and see in the Church. In this gathering today we pray, listen to your word to us and sing hymns of praise and thanksgiving so that we may learn to live as wise people, in Christ Jesus. God of the bread that lasts hear our prayer.

Bless our sisters and brothers in all the churches of this country. Enable us to live in closer harmony with one another, expressing the unity we have in Jesus, the living bread. Teach us to serve you in the world together for the sake of the Kingdom and not for our own glory and honour. God of the bread that lasts hear our prayer.

Or [\[11\]](#)

Presider or deacon

Let us mix the wine and set the table with prayer for those in desperate need.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For all nations and their leaders, and for mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

For students and teachers, and all those returning to their studies.

For travelers and those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For the sick and the suffering, prisoners and their families, the hungry and the oppressed, and all in danger and need.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

For our city and those who live in it, and for our families, companions, and all we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God

through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God of eternal life, who built a house of faithful people, have mercy on all who gather in your name and grant our prayers for all the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] R.B.Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastics: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965, p. 77.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 384, citing *Gesammelte Studien zum Altes Testament*, p. 277.

[3] Marcus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974, p. 578.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 579.

[5] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 57

[6] Antilanguage is the language of the Christian community which takes common language and fills it with other and contrary meaning to communicate its own special perception of God's presence among them and work for them. "Jesus' behavior and that of his in-group always manifest the dimensions that derive from the attitudes and behavior of those not of this world...." *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[9] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1b9900.txt>

[10] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt

[11] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>