Sermon for November 8th, 2026

TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Proverbs 8:11-22

10 Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold,
11 for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and I find knowledge and discretion.
13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.
14 I have counsel and sound wisdom;
I have insight; I have strength.
15 By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;
16 by me princes rule,
and nobles, all who govern justly.
17 I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
18 Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and righteousness.
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
20 I walk in the way of righteousness,
in the paths of justice,
21 granting an inheritance to those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.
22 "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old.

Psalm 111

(Collect verses in **bold**)

1 Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
2 Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
3 Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
4 He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
5 He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.

6 He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.
7 The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;
8 they are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
9 He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name!
10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever!

Philippians 3:17-21

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. **18** For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. **20** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Matthew 22:15-22

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. **16** And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. **17** Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” **18** But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? **19** Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. **20** And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” **21** They said, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” **22** When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

Our meditation this Twenty Third Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel text.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction: Good news and bad news

I have good news and bad news for you my friends. The good news is, you are wise. Congratulations! Wisdom is the skill for living, the ability of a man to make the best decisions for himself based on his knowledge and experience. Everyone, whether man or woman or child, has this habitude. If you have ever gotten better at anything and been able to put that into practice, then that was wisdom growing in you. Mankind has demonstrated tremendous wisdom over the centuries and has a lot to show for it. We have built skyscrapers, rockets, complex systems of government, and a rich global literary tradition, just to name a few accomplishments that make humanity shine above the animals. This applies to every human by the way: the smallest toddler has more wisdom in him than the smartest dolphin or most well-trained dog, and the dumbest adult is still wiser in his actions than any

sheep. Our wisdom is one of the most recognizable signs that we were originally made in the Image of God: we are fearfully and wonderfully made.[1]

That is the good news. The bad news is, this wisdom is not wise in the way God is wise, and that makes it worthless. As St. Paul says, "the wisdom of this world is folly with God."[2] No really, that is awful news indeed. Man's wisdom is impressive...to man and nobody else. We have spent the past six thousand years developing wisdom and achieving great things all for it to be worth less than a bucket of spit to God. This is especially important because God is our *judge*. While humanity seeks to establish its wisdom and judge itself based on how clever, cunning or prudent they are, the entire time our Lord looks at such a fervent rat race among the sages and laughs, because they are not doing anything about the rubric they will *truly* be judged over.

Our Wisdom is Folly

Human wisdom might be a sight to behold, but it is not going to get us anywhere with God. It is like a woman deciding to enter a beauty contest without reading the rules. She spends all of her time working on her looks and managing her figure until she is a modern Helen of Troy...but on the big day she is immediately disqualified for wearing a dress instead of the swimsuit the judges required. It is as though a man were to start a business without doing any market research. He gets his degree in business management, obtains all the right funding to start his business, gets all of the permits for his business to operate legally. But then he mourns as he gets no customers, because his business is selling broken glass and nobody wants to buy anything from "Ernie's Broken Glass Emporium."

The glory of human wisdom is found in the way it helps us to accomplish tasks and live comfortably. We ought not fool ourselves into thinking it is unnecessary when it comes to menial things like driving safely or setting up a bank account. The folly of human wisdom is found in the way sin twists it; sinners are convinced that this is the only wisdom they need, or even worse yet that it constitutes some moral status. In place of faith in God, there is in the world a bizarrely earnest belief among the nonbelievers that somehow their sagacity gives them *authority* over our Lord. Don't just take it from me, here is Luther on the matter:

> "No poorer, more lowly and despised pupil on earth than God! He must be everybody's Disciple. Everybody wants to be His schoolmaster and teacher. This you see in all heretics from the beginning of the world [...] They cannot let it remain as He has instituted it but imagine that they must produce something too in order to be better than other people and to be able to boast: 'This is what *I* have done; what God has done and established is too ordinary and trifling, nay, too childish and foolish.' Such is the nature of this shameful wisdom on earth, especially in the Christian Church..."[3]

While Luther goes on to say that the problem of worldly wisdom is found in bishops and ministers, these days everyone has the same problem. I confess that this is a personal gripe, but I cannot tell you how often I have heard silly Christians who thought they were smart tell me that the wisest or smartest among us should "rule" over others, only to cite moral monsters of history like Marcus Aurelius as their role models. Ah, Marcus Aurelius the philosopher and emperor of Rome – a man who mocked Christian martyrs and facilitated their persecutions, a real *wise* one that Marcus! And so these believers, as wayward and foolish as they are wise, invite such persecutions on their own head.

God's Wisdom is Higher

When Solomon personifies wisdom and uses her to speak on the topic, he is referring to *God's* wisdom – not ours – and it is a greater possession than any earthly blessing like money or power. This

1 Psalm 139:14
2 1 Corinthians 3:19
3 From *What Luther Says*, vol.III. Concordia Publishing House, 1959, pg.1453

is because following it means putting God's Commandments first and subordinating our will to our Lord's Will. The wisdom of worldly men says that you can make a lot of friends by being arrogant and bombastic: Heavenly wisdom abominates pride and arrogance. Worldly wisdom says that if you can get away with stealing, then doing so is fine so long as no one gets hurt: Heavenly wisdom says that we must hate such evils no matter how harmless they seem. The cleverest of sinners will say"try before you buy" when telling you to engage in fornication with your girlfriend, while Heavenly wisdom will tell you that waiting for marriage is the only right way – in fact, even perverted *speech* is verboten to the believer.

You see my friends, while mundane wisdom (also called common sense) is useful, what humanity thinks works *best* is explicitly forbidden by anyone who would have the higher wisdom. Certainly this means missing out. Follow the Lord's ways and you will sometimes find yourself lonelier, poorer, less popular and having less fun than the nonbelievers. But Solomon says that this *higher* wisdom that keeps God's commandments is far greater than anything you could ever own here on earth. Why is that my friends? Because God blesses those who obey His commands.

The blessings for obedience are many, and following after heavenly wisdom – putting God's priorities first in all things – contains most of them. Solomon's personification of wisdom promises strength, peace, wealth, good governance, honor, longer life, and a whole host of other goods for men. Whoever follows His ways and does not receive these things in this life will assuredly receive them in eternity. This is because God sees those who entrust themselves to Him and blesses them. It is also because living this way *works better* than the common advice of the world. Heavenly wisdom is a fantastic shield. If you do not steal, you shall not be punished for stealing. If you do not commit adultery, hardly anyone calls you a lecher or a cheater. If you do not bear false witness, few will ever think to lie about you. Follow God's ways, the higher wisdom, and you'll see it being its own reward quite handily.

Solomon tells us to seek it out, to get wisdom before anything else. How do we get it? From God. This kind of wisdom that you ought to seek out belongs to the Lord, who will only give it to you if you ask Him. Thankfully, as the Apostle St. James teaches, if you ask for this wisdom in faith then He will surely grant it to you.[4] This is how we know that it is not the same thing as faith: faith begins one's journey and walks alongside them. Faith is how we *receive* wisdom as we pray for it, faith in the Son of God who died and rose to make whoever trusts in Him acceptable before God. We must accept the Gospel first, and then pray for help with wisdom, having the firm conviction that Christ has rendered us acceptable to God by putting His righteousness in place of ours.

Conclusion

Yes, heavenly wisdom is for those with faith. For by faith we please God, and by faith we know that He rewards those who seek Him.[5] And if we believe in His Word and His work, namely the Gospel, then the God who possessed wisdom at the very beginning and used it for creating the universe shall impart it unto us as well, and we shall be blessed. Therefore my friends, let us put off the dead weight of sinful man's twisted wisdom, and believing in Christ may we adhere to the heavenly sagacity which shall result in our good.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

4 James 1:5-6
5 Hebrews 11:6