

Sermon for August 19, 2018
Pastor Martha Schwehn Bardwell
John 6: 51-58
Proverbs 9:1-6
Ephesians 5:15-20

“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil” – we hear in our reading from Ephesians this morning.

I think most of us—if not all of us—want to be wise. We want to be wise in an age of fake news and constant distractions. We want wisdom to navigate and heal strained relationships. We want wisdom to help us live with chronic health conditions. We want wisdom to understand how to speak truth and seek reconciliation in a fractured and fearful political landscape. And I think that most of us feel this sense of urgency to become wise people— we want to make the most of the time.

So out of this desire for wisdom we must ask ourselves: Where is wisdom to be found?

I found myself asking this question my sophomore year in college. I had applied to several study abroad programs, and I decided at the end of my sophomore year to study at Oxford University. I decided to immerse myself in this place that has quite the reputation for wisdom.

It wasn't long after I'd arrived at Oxford that I felt painfully lonely. I felt like such a stranger in a strange land of too many books, and overly serious people, and British wealth.

One afternoon maybe my second week there, as I was climbing up the stairs to my dorm room, I saw another dorm room door wide open. I poked my head in and saw a tall skinny German guy. We introduced ourselves; his name was Ben, and he quickly invited me to come inside. “Do you like tea?” He asked. “Yes!” I said, which was true. “Have you ever tried mate before?” he asked. I hadn't.

As Ben heated up the water, and started preparing the mate, he told me about this special tea that he had started drinking while living in Argentina. He explained that there was one cup for us – a hollowed out gourd – which we would share. He added the herbs to the gourd, and poured the hot water on top – and then he inserted the bombilla, a kind of metal straw that strains the tea as you sip from it. As we waited for it to steep, he explained to me that *the thing about mate is, you don't drink it alone*. You don't drink it alone. Mate is a drink that can ONLY be drunk socially, with other people. Ben had been

wanting to drink mate ever since he'd arrived at Oxford– but he too hadn't really met anyone yet. This all was so mindblowing to me. That he would really wait to drink mate with someone else, rather than indulging privately, amazed me – it defied everything our American culture of convenience and individualism had instilled in me. We sat, taking turns drinking mate, for a couple of hours, and our friendship was born that day.

Where is wisdom to be found?

I tell this story about mate as a kind of parable to launch us into exploring our texts about holy Wisdom and how she operates. When I was lonely and looking for wisdom, I didn't initially find it in the conventional place – in books, in lectures, in brilliant minds. Instead, I found a room with drink that was waiting for me, I found friendship and belonging, I found a place to dwell for a while, where my spirit was fed. A place where I was reminded once again, that the wisdom that we find in Christian spirituality is all about *sharing life*. This wisdom about sharing life defies the 'conventional wisdom' of American consumer culture, of individualism.

In our Proverbs reading this morning – we meet Wisdom herself. She calls out to us lonely ones – “Come inside!” she says. She holds her door wide open and calls out to those of us who are stumbling around for meaning. And she invites us to a feast. She shares her food with us at her table.

Many Christians over the centuries have claimed that this Wisdom we meet in the book of Proverbs is an image of God – a name for the Divine; and some theologians have seen in Jesus, Wisdom made flesh.¹ “The Word became flesh, and dwelled among us,” we read at the beginning of John's gospel. This “Word” – or *logos*, in Greek, is thought by some theologians to be another name for Wisdom. This theology, identifying Jesus with Wisdom goes back to the very early church – we read in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, his claim that Jesus Christ, who lived, who loved, who shared mercy and friendship with the lost and broken, and who was crucified by the authorities, is the very Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). Paul goes on in this passage to say that the Wisdom of God that we glimpse in Jesus seems like utter foolishness to the world. Utter foolishness.

Well that takes us right into our gospel reading for this morning. We hear Jesus, Wisdom incarnate, inviting us to eat in our gospel today. However, as usual, Jesus takes things to another level – a deeper level – a 'foolish' level you could say – in that it offends our rational minds. Today Jesus doesn't just say, like Wisdom in Proverbs - come into my house and eat with me at my table. He doesn't say – here, have some bread I made. He says – I am the living bread. And then he makes it all even more vivid in a way that

¹ See especially Elizabeth Johnson's book, *She Who Is*.

might strike us as, well, kind of disturbing! As foolishness to the world! He says **“And the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh.”**

He says: **“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink”**

These words shock us awake to the mystery that is at the heart of the Christian faith and our claims about Wisdom. These words are mindblowing. And they jolt us into marveling at the incarnation – God made flesh. They jolt us into marveling that God was not content to stay distant – that Wisdom was not content to stay as an ‘idea’ or an ‘ideal’ out there somewhere to be grasped and reached for. Rather, God came among us, to be with us, to share flesh-and-blood life with us. God came in weakness, and vulnerability – as a friend and servant to creation, to share God’s love and life with the world.

And what’s more, this flesh and blood God, this flesh and blood wisdom, didn’t just live and leave – didn’t just live, die, rise, and go back up there somewhere. No.

In our reading this morning we can hear the early Christian community behind John’s gospel, claiming for us - This One is STILL present, in the meal that we share together in fellowship, in the bread and the wine – Jesus’s own flesh and blood presence is really, truly, here - now. And this One, this Wisdom, this Christ then becomes a part of us – living IN us! In the bread and wine we share, God’s flesh and blood becomes our flesh and blood.

As we all reach for metaphors to capture this holy mystery, it seems to me that breastfeeding is the best image I can think of for the way that God shares God’s very lifeblood with us in this meal. Here are some other words that can help us touch the mystery of what we’re talking about: our very own Amy Blumenshine says when she is serving wine at communion: “The vitality of Christ flows in you!”

The vitality of Christ, the flesh and blood of the Living God is indeed here, friends. God is sharing her life with us, abiding with us, and inspiring us to share our lives and the very life of God with others - to abide with them, as Jesus did – as lovers, healers, peacekeepers, listeners, dinner companions. The vitality of Christ is here - in people preparing to visit the sick among us – Holy Wisdom is present. In planning pizza oven events, where we can feast with friends of other cultures – Wisdom is here. In signing up to vote our values in November, and take seriously our calling to love our neighbors from the ballot box to the streets and beyond – She is here. In the peace be with you among new friends and old friends, spoken to bodies that carry new hurts and old hurts – She is

here. In Bible study where we share our lives and open our hearts and minds to drink in God's wisdom – She is here.

Amid the fake news, distractions, health challenges, strained relationships, and fractured politics of our time – we can turn here, friends, and be fed by Wisdom herself. So let's make the most of the time, and abide with Wisdom this day; let's allow the vitality of Christ to flow in us—in this place, and out of this place. *For God has chosen to share God's life with us.* As our minds are blown by this truth, may our hearts also be opened, to share life with others in new ways, to share time, and money, and mate, and all the gifts of this life with others, as friends of God and friends of all creation. Amen.