

Welcome Sunday 2018
Aug. 19, 2018
Chapel of the Resurrection
Preacher: Rev. James A. Wetzstein, University Pastor

A reading from Proverbs, Chapter 9: "Wisdom has built her house. She calls, 'Come. Eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity and live and walk in the way of insight.'"

A reading from the Gospel according to John, the 6th chapter. "This is the bread that came down from heaven" said Jesus. "Not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But, the one who eats this bread will live forever."

The Word of the Lord.

Wisdom has built her house. She has set her table. Now she calls out "Come. Eat my bread and drink my wine. Lay aside immaturity and live. Walk in the way of insight."

What a fantastic reading for the start of a school year. After all, that's what this place is all about. And not just this place, this chapel, but this whole institution. This whole university is about being a place where all sorts of people from all sorts of places and backgrounds come together and seek truth, seek knowledge, desire, wisdom. New students, I hope that's why you came, because you desired wisdom the way Solomon desired wisdom and prayed for nothing else.

Oh sure, there are other reasons for being here. Maybe everyone in your family and all of your teachers at school expected you to go to college. Maybe when you were visiting schools, you fell in love with this place. Maybe you are looking for a place to make a fresh start. Maybe you want a good job that pays well someday. Maybe your parents want nothing more than that from you, and for you.

Yet I hope that over all of that in importance and under it all as foundational, it's truth you seek, knowledge you crave, wisdom you desire. I pray you desire to ask persistent questions of your studies, of yourselves, of your world. There is just so much that's worth knowing, because there's just so much of creation. Oh yes, there's always lots of talk of poverty and deprivation in our world, and there's no question that far too many of our neighbors around the world do without the opportunities and conditions that we take for granted. But that's not for a lack of divine generosity and creation. In God's world, there's much to know and do and share. I pray that you discover this for yourself if you're not already aware. I pray you discover it at this university and all of the places in your future.

Those that came to this place before you did. Here's what some of them have told us about the things they discovered at Valpo:

"That everyone has a struggle and personal story that they're facing," said one.

"That God provides us with many good things and opportunities and passions, and we can make choices," said another.

Another said, "Empathy. I learned empathy."

Another said, "Valpo made me realize that it's not about me, and once you let go of ego and pride and insecurity and fear of whatever (fill that in here), that your road to success has already been traveled."

Another said, "I learned that part of truly growing and succeeding is failing first."

And finally, my favorite, “I learned that lipstick isn’t easy to remove from a statue.”

Wisdom has built her house and now she invites you to eat and drink of that she has to offer. Drink it all in. It will be an engaging and stretching and an abundant blessing. Yet these things that you will discover for yourselves, these things that are symbolized in the lower panels of these big windows behind me far to the left and on the far right, artistic creativity and scientific discovery, meaningful vocations that make use of your gifts for the service of your neighbor and the whole world. The work that you will do, it will never be permanent. It will never be definitive. Your work will never be the last word on anything. It will always only be for now. For today, as beautiful as it is and as it will be, like daily manna in the wilderness, it will satisfy today. Tomorrow, there will be a need for more.

So if you think it’s all about getting your work done and then you’re good, know this: The people who get their stuff done, they get more stuff to do. Nothing ever lasts. Nothing is ever finely and perfectly satisfying. This, too, is one of wisdom’s many insights. It’s been this way since the days of our first parents. When they were expelled from paradise, God had this bit of wisdom for them because of what they had done: That they would put their back into their work only to find it frequently dissatisfying and sometimes even fruitless. That they would long for one another’s company but realize in that company, another who in so many ways was a disappointment and remained a mystery to them. That they would seek to find hope for their own future in their own children, and yet that would always bring pain and sometimes even alienation.

Jesus says, your forebearers ate manna in the wilderness and yet died on their way to the Promised Land. Those who were born on the journey sustained all their days by God’s daily gift and entered in the land long promised by God. Even they, when they arrived at their destination and the daily provisions from God were replaced by the joys of the fertility of the land, even they died at the end of their lives. The pilgrimage towards final rest and satisfaction continues. The search for truth goes on; finding beauty, but not ultimate fulfillment.

And then Jesus comes. The perfect pilgrim. He is traveling truth, walking and talking among us. He knows the poetry of wisdom’s call. He knows the promise of eating and drinking in order to sustain a life that is truly and eternally satisfying because he himself is eternal life, eternal rest, satisfaction. He also knows that if all we do is work and consume the stuff of our own making, if we live only with the wisdom of our own discovery, we will never realize the eternal rest for which we long. So he offers himself.

He identifies himself as bread and wine from heaven. He is wisdom’s perfect fare. Now it’s probably impossible for church folk to hear these words from Jesus and not think of Holy Communion, of the Lord’s Supper. I, myself, encourage you to make that connection. But for Jesus’ first hearers, that connection wasn’t to be made. No one turned to the person next to them and said “I believe what he is referring to is the Lord’s Supper, which he will invent later in his ministry on the night he is betrayed.” They didn’t say that because they were too busy trying to figure out what in the world he was even talking about. How can this one who we know, whose family we know, pitch himself as someone who is superior to the great Moses? Say that he is bread from heaven?

It was such a reaction, that John goes on to record that people began to abandon Jesus. It was bad. It was so bad that Jesus turned to his twelve closest friend and asked them if they were going to leave as well. And then Peter, speaking for every believer ever since, replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” This is to say, that we trust that you,

Jesus, are telling us the truth about ourselves and about our God. We trust you to be the truth so much that we'll take your word over every other word, even our own. We'll hear you call us children of our Heavenly Father when we feel like we have no one in our corner. We'll remember that our ultimate value is not in our work, but in the value of your precious blood offered in exchange for us. We'll hear our calling as ones empowered to serve as agents of God in a creation destined for resurrection and restoration, even when it doesn't look like it. When it looks like everything is falling apart. When we're exhausted by our work, we'll honor your call to find our rest in you. When we feel foolish, we'll hear you telling us that the Spirit is making us wise. When we are ashamed of our failure, we'll know the honor of your forgiveness. When we feel like we are dying, we'll know that you are making us alive.

This is what the angels pictured in the center panel of the windows in the Chapel of the Resurrection are announcing. That's why high above them is the motto of your life, displayed in brilliant, blood-red letters. It reads: **Jesus Christ, victor**. So we're taking hold of all of this that's on offer here, not to make something of ourselves or to prove our worth or our place in this world. We take hold of all of this brilliant human knowledge and skill in order to build on the discoveries of others because it is the calling that we have to live in to, to lean in to: Our Resurrection. All that we know, is being perfected in the return of Christ and the restoration of all creation.

Wisdom has built a house. Wisdom is in the house. His name is Jesus.
Amen.