

August 16, 2015 / Season after Pentecost / David L. Edwards

## **We Are What We Eat**

*Proverbs 9:1-6 / Psalm 34 / Ephesians 5:15-20 / John 6:51-58*

We are becoming more aware that we truly are what we eat. There is nutritious food, and there is harmful food. The same is true in the realm of our spiritual lives, which includes our minds and our emotions, as well as our bodies. We take in what is nourishing, and we thrive spiritually. We consume what is harmful, and we harm ourselves and others. That is what our readings for today are about. It is what we are about as a faith community—growing in our capacity to discern and consume what is spiritually good for us, what nourishes the life of prayer and of service for which we were created, the inward and the outward dimensions of our lives.

### **The Feast of Wisdom**

The Book of Proverbs belongs to what are called “wisdom writings”. Wisdom is a tradition of spiritual insight that is positive about our created capacity to live as God created us to live. There is no “original sin” here. We are able to choose either the way of wisdom or the way of ignorance, which in the wisdom tradition is a know-it-all attitude that is unable or unwilling to be taught, to learn.

Wisdom is a way of living shaped and guided by what the Bible calls the “fear of God”, a phrase that has been misunderstood and misrepresented by certain sectors of Christianity. The fear of God means living with awed awareness, with a sense of reverence for the sacred dimension of life and our own lives in relation to God. Wisdom is seeking and finding the best, most fruitful ways to live with regard to our own lives, others, and the world as God's creation. We have the capacity for wisdom, but we lose touch with it as we succumb to all the attractive and superficial distractions that surround us. As Don Morrison said to me Friday at

the Cafe, we are fed a lot of junk! It is our spiritual work to choose what we will take into ourselves, physically and spiritually.

In the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is pictured as Woman Wisdom. Let's call her Sophia, which is the Greek word for wisdom. Sophia has prepared a sumptuous feast, sent out her servants to invite us in, and called us to come and feast on something truly nourishing. I was in a health food store once, looking for a multi-vitamin. The woman who helped me asked what I was taking. It was a name brand you buy anywhere. She said, "So, you would like something that actually does you some good?" I laughed. Of course! That's what Sophia is doing, trying to draw our attention to something that actually does us some good, over the long haul of our lives. Something that enriches our lives toward ourselves, others, and God. A way of seeing, a way of living, that is really real and not the shallow, empty, meaningless, harmful stuff being sold us every day by a thousand peddlers—including religious ones--in our culture.

The way of wisdom is discerning the best ways to live as those created by God, aware that our life is drawn, not from the cultural envelope in which we live, but from the sacred source of all life. The way of wisdom asks: How am I to live given the spiritual fact that my life comes from God? How am I to live, given the fact of this world as the beloved creation of God, in and through which God is present? How am I to live, what decisions am I to make, as one who lives with the "fear of God", that is, with awareness of the sacredness of life and my own life? The way of wisdom values this life, and calls us to live with care, with spiritual awareness, with attentiveness in our decisions and actions and words. This is why our inward journey is important, to make space and time daily for seeing our lives in this wider, deeper context. It is way we share in the feast prepared for us by Woman Wisdom.

### **Taste and See**

Which leads us to Psalm 34: "O taste and see that the Lord is good. Happy are those who trust in God." A more literal translation would be, "Find out for

yourself that God is good.” Here is a spirituality, a life of faith, that invites us to find out for ourselves! Not to take someone else’s word for it. Not to make faith into adopting religious ideas or doctrines, a mental exercise. Not turning religion into religiosity, a matter of belonging to an institution which we promote, perpetuate, or, God forbid, use as a platform to condemn others. The minute we start trying to keep the Church of the Covenant going without living what the Church of the Covenant is about, we are dead in the water! The biblical view is much more exciting than what we have made religion into! And I think those who founded our community knew that.

Find out for yourself that God is good. It is about experience. What does it mean to love God with our whole being? Find out for yourself! What does it mean to love our neighbor as ourself? Find out for yourself! What does it mean die and be raised to new life? Find out for yourself! What does it mean to respond to Jesus’ call to follow him in the life of prayer and service? Find out for yourself!

The life of faith has to be something real, for each of us, in our own daily lives. Faith has to mean living our lives in such a way that God becomes real for us and that we come alive to who we are created to be. And it has to mean living so that we know the gifts we have been given to share, so that our lives become instruments of God’s redemptive love for the world. That is finding out for ourselves.

This is why membership in this community means making a commitment to our own lives and faith. It means giving a structure or form to our lives that enables us to find out for ourselves each day that God is good, to find out each day what it means to follow Jesus in the life of love. It means being willing to be held accountable for this life of faith, to share with others how we are doing and what we are learning. We make time in our mission groups, for instance, for each member to share how she or he is doing with the group’s spiritual disciplines and with his or her life in general. Giving accountability reports is how we share what we are finding out, what we are tasting and seeing, as we live this life of faith. It is what helps make it all real. This is why the founders of this community realized the

ages-old wisdom of spiritual practices, or disciplines. They are the fruitful structure that enables us to find out for ourselves, to taste and see the goodness of God and the goodness of the life of faith.

### **Living Wisely, Singing Gratefully**

Reading the Ephesians 5 passage, I wondered what to say about it. The references to living with wisdom, choosing right ways of living, connect with the readings from Proverbs and the psalm. We are counseled to live wisely, out of the “fear of God”. What this writer adds is a sense of urgency about it. If we are not paying attention, if we are not trying to live wisely, we are wasting our time, our lives. A part of living with wisdom is asking ourselves, “Is this something that is meaningful and worthwhile, or is it a waste of my time and energy?” “Am I preoccupied with what everyone else is doing, and neglecting my own life and what I am called to do?” In our community, we need to work with the question, “Is this something I am called to or not? Is this where my gifts are needed, or not?” Paying attention, and staying focused on call and gifts. Most everything else is a waste of time.

Then, however, there is the word about singing songs and psalms and hymns, and being grateful in our hearts. Singing together is a most important spiritual activity of the community of Jesus. Singing opens us up, lifts us up beyond the mundane concerns of everyday life, and floods our spirits with encouragement, hope, and energy. We become more grateful when we sing. Singing together, we experience being in community rather than isolated individuals. We touch a oneness that transcends the things that tend to divide us—ideas, opinions, differing ways of living out our faith. Throughout my life, from my childhood on, it was the singing of the church that meant the most to me, that shaped my spirit and life more than anything else. The hymns, their tunes and words, joining in with others, whether I was sitting in the pew or in the choir loft. That is why I appreciate this community's worship so much. Singing together is very much at the center of our worship and spiritual life. I will say more about this on another Sunday before I

leave, for I want to talk more about our worship and our singing together and why it is so important.

### **Eating and Drinking Jesus**

Woman Wisdom invites us to the feast of living out of our relationship with God and the world as God's good creation. Psalm 34 invites us to taste and see for ourselves God's reality, presence, and goodness. In John's gospel, Jesus invites us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, to take into ourselves this bread of heaven, our true life.

Two weeks ago Kaye and I spent some days at Loretto KY, which will become our new home. We went to Mass that Sunday morning in the church at the Loretto Motherhouse. I had not been back to Loretto for several years. It felt good to be there, but also somewhat strange given the circumstances of my retirement and the realization that this would become home. As time approached for the Eucharist, I was making up my mind whether or not to go forward to partake. The Loretto community has always made it clear that guests, no matter what their tradition, are welcome to partake of the bread and wine. This, of course, is unusual for a Catholic community.

I have never warmed to the view of the Eucharist as transubstantiation, that the bread and wine are, or become, the actual body and blood of Jesus. However, that morning I felt a bit differently. I had been reading along in the lectionary Jesus' words in John's gospel about being the bread come down from heaven, and then the words for today about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. I felt a renewed appreciation for the Eucharist. Its importance does not lie in the act itself, by itself, but as it reflects and embodies the meaning of the life of following Jesus. It is that life which has the nature of eating and drinking Jesus' life. It is eating the bread from heaven and living forever. Eternal life. The life we were created to live, which has the quality of forever, of the eternal. John's gospel does not even include the Lord's Supper, but instead has Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, an act of servanthood. To me this says even more clearly that our lives as

followers of Jesus are a matter of eating and drinking his life, which is our true life as human beings. It is the feast of our true life. It is finding out daily the goodness of God in this life we were created to live. It is touching in Jesus' life our own true lives, now and forever.

All of our readings for today seem to be saying to us, "Take your life seriously." Choose carefully what you do, and give attention to, and consume. Let your living be in awareness of God and the world as God's creation, full of God's presence. As followers of Jesus, make his life, his teachings, his spirit, all that he embodied, your bread and wine, your spiritual food. It is your true life as God created you to live. And, along the way, keep on singing, together and in your hearts. It will keep you living out of gratitude!