

PENTECOST 13

Proper 15 - Year B

*Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies.
Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.*

Proverbs 9:1-6

- 9 Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.
- ²She has slaughtered her animals; she has mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.
- ³She has sent out her female servants; she calls
from the highest places in the town,
- ⁴“You who 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.
- ⁶Lay aside immaturity and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

In this passage, we receive an invitation from Wisdom herself – probably a better dinner invitation than many of us have received. From her vast stores of riches, from her sumptuous home, she bids all draw near to partake of her generosity. The invitation is not exclusive, either – to everyone, the call goes out: “Come in, come in!” There’s but a slight catch here: by joining the feast, by putting aside our follies, by turning from the way of death, we will be forever changed. This seems familiar – perhaps a type that foretells of our Lord’s call to the whole world: “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.” In joining the feast, we, too, are changed.

Discussion Questions

How do you envision the feast that Wisdom prepares?

Psalm 34:9-14

- ⁹ Fear the Lord, you that are his saints, *
for those who fear him lack nothing.
- ¹⁰ The young lions lack and suffer hunger, *
but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that
is good.
- ¹¹ Come, children, and listen to me; *
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
- ¹² Who among you loves life *
and desires long life to enjoy prosperity?
- ¹³ Keep your tongue from evil-speaking *
and your lips from lying words.
- ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; *
seek peace and pursue it.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Fear can be a hard concept for us to apply to God, yet here we are, instructed in the first verse to fear him! Why ought we tremble when the one who lovingly created us and cares for us – the one who set the stars in the sky and still cares for the sparrow – why should we fear him? The Hebrew root word in this text “אָרַי,” (pronounced ya-RAY) can indeed mean “to fear” – we see that same form when Adam is confronted by God in the Garden of Eden, and the inverse when the word of the Lord comes to Abram in Genesis 15:1, telling him to *not* be afraid. But perhaps a better way for us to understand the term in this context is not boot-shaking fear, but deepest reverence, awe, honor, and respect. How can we show such reverence to God? By telling the truth in love, but reorienting ourselves from evil to good behavior, by seeking and working for peace.

Discussion Questions

Read the psalm again with this new approach to the word translated as “fear”.

How would our daily lives be different if we lived in the deepest reverence, awe, and honor toward the Lord?

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 to one another, 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.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Paul's advice is good enough on its own, but knowing a little bit about the context in which he's writing will be helpful. Ephesus was a center of the cult of Dionysus. For those not up on their Greek mythology, Dionysus was also known as Bacchus, from whose name we get the word "bacchanal" – a wild party characterized by extreme drunkenness and orgies. For devotees of this sect, communing with God by necessity included getting extraordinarily drunk on wine and, shall we say, more. This is ridiculous to Paul; to connect with the king of the universe is to lead a life of praise, of gratitude, of singing. While people can, of course, enjoy themselves, there is nothing pleasing to God about an unbridled temperament, foolishness, or licentiousness.

Discussion Questions

Where have you felt like you've communed with God? What was the setting?

John 6:51-58

⁵¹I 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.”

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So 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. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

How interesting that the full theme of today’s readings is revealed in the Gospel: what we consume does, in some sense, *matter*. We are to join Wisdom at her table, partaking in her sumptuous food and drink. We are to revere more than all others our Lord, and in doing so, will never suffer hunger or let evil pass our lips. We are to encounter God not in self-indulgence or drunkenness, but in sweet songs of praise. And we are to be truly refreshed not by over-indulgence, but in the bread and wine that walked (and walks!) among us.

Discussion Questions

Can you imagine how shocked Jesus’ audience would be, hearing this teaching?

Which of today’s readings was most impactful to you?