

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 16 – September 9th and 12th, 2010

Proverbs 9:8-12

**Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you;
rebuke a wise man and he will love you.
Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still;
teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.**

**“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
For through me your days will be many,
and years will be added to your life.
If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you;
if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”**

Dear children bought with the precious blood Christ,

As many of you might know, I'm a big sports fan. I enjoy playing and watching most kinds of sports. What I've noticed from watching sports is that the elite players in whatever sport aren't always the fastest or strongest. But they're usually the ones who are skilled and know the game. Take Peyton Manning, for example. He's arguably the best player in the NFL, but he's certainly not the fastest or the strongest. But he understands the game. He can look at a defense and make the right adjustments that end in a successful play. Over the years, his game intelligence has improved. And he has become a better player.

The Bible puts this same idea into spiritual terms and calls it “wisdom.” It's not just mere knowledge of the facts. It's not just knowing the right thing to do. Wisdom involves knowing the facts and putting them into practice. Wisdom means having the discernment and the desire to put the truths of God's Word into action in the right way in this godless world. God's Word promises that success will follow true wisdom.

But how do we get and keep wisdom? Peyton Manning didn't become an all-pro quarterback overnight. He had to develop his skills. He had to study film. He had to work hard. But his work has been rewarded. He is a MVP and Super Bowl champion. Wisdom isn't something we come by naturally. Solomon received his unique wisdom as a gift from God. True wisdom is also a gift from God. It is something we have to nurture. We can get wiser. And God has promised blessings through our wisdom.

Theme: Better Your Life By Getting Wiser

- 1. How do I get wiser**
- 2. How does your life get better**

Before we can ask how we get wiser, we have to consider how we got wise in the first place. There is a connection. In fact, it's the same way. Through the Word, God has given you true wisdom because the Spirit is at work through the Word. We're born without the Spirit. Therefore, we're born without wisdom. God's Word and God's ways don't make sense to the unbeliever. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, **“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”**

Through the Law of God, the Spirit convicts you of your sins. He gives you the wisdom to understand your sinfulness, that you have not met the holy standards of the Holy One. You have not placed him first at all time. You have misused his name and despised his Word. You have disobeyed those in authority. You haven't always been kind to everyone. You've been filled with lust, greed, and selfishness. You've lied and gossiped. God's Word reveals God's expectations of perfection. Failure – even one failure – results in eternal punishment. God's Word gives us the wisdom to realize that we should have a holy terror of the holy God.

Through the Gospel of God, the Spirit comforts you in the face of this terror. He gives you the wisdom to understand your salvation in Christ, that Jesus lived up to God's holy standards and gives you his righteousness, that the Holy One died on the cross in your place to wipe away your sins. Do you know when you first got that wisdom? At your baptism, when the Spirit brought you to faith in Jesus. Through baptism, you were connected to the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Do you see the importance of baptism? That's why the baptismal font is up front, so that every time we come to worship, we're reminded that the Spirit gave us new life at baptism. What Paul wrote to Timothy is so true of many of us, **"From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."**

This wisdom – this understanding of what our gracious God has done for us – works a godly fear in us, that we stand in awe of the loving work of our Lord. **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."** The Word of God – with the message of God's holy demands and holy love – wouldn't seem to be a source of wisdom. God's ways, especially the way of the cross, doesn't seem that wise in our minds. But listen to what Paul wrote. **"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."**

And right there is the answer to how you get wiser. Wisdom needs to be nurtured. If Peyton Manning stopped studying film and learning defensive tendencies, he would soon lose his effectiveness. We need to keep growing and learning. We get wiser by studying the Word. Listen to Solomon's words. **"Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning."** You are wise by the work of the Spirit. You are righteous because you've been washed in the blood of Jesus. The more you're in the Word, the more you're hearing the foolishness of what is preached, the more you're listening to the message of Christ crucified, the more you're connected to the power and wisdom of God. Then you'll become wiser.

You have so many opportunities to do this. Every weekend in worship you hear "foolish" preaching. But it's the wisdom of God because the cross of Christ is the focus of our worship. Paul wrote, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom."** You do this as you listen to the lessons and sermon, as you confess your faith to one another, as you sing hymns that express the truths of God's Word in profound poetry and stirring music. We have numerous Bible classes where you can get wiser. Look at the bulletin, at the selection of classes. I would think there is one for everyone's schedule. What an opportunity to mine the depths of God's wisdom! Our children have opportunities in our Lutheran Day school and High Schools and our Sunday school. Growth in wisdom starts from baptism. They can grow as they study how God carried out his loving plan for their salvation and their lives. Study and read the Bible at home, by yourself, with your spouse, with your family. If you haven't already done so, pick up one of the Meditations. You can check out books from our library. You can purchase book from our Northwestern Publishing House. You can never learn everything in the Bible. That's the genius of God's Word. There's always more to learn, different applications because we have different life experiences. We can always get wiser. And we get wiser through the Word.

As you get wiser, your life will get better. Better your life by getting wiser. But how does your life get better? **"For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life."** Through the Word, the Spirit is at work, making us wiser, strengthening our faith. The stronger our faith, the more faithful we will be in our Christian lives. We will be drawing on God's power source, his Word and Sacraments, where we receive the forgiveness we need. As we live more God-pleasing lives, life goes a little smoother. We live healthier lives. Think of the promise God made in the 4th Commandment. "Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." When children listen to their parents and stay away from drugs, they'll avoid the life-endangering problems of drug abuse. When we don't get drunk, we'll be healthier. Living a God-pleasing sexual life keeps us free from sexually transmitted diseases and relationship problems. A godly attitude toward finances will keep us from getting worried and stressed out. **"Godliness with contentment is great gain,"** Paul wrote. God promises blessings when his children live wisely by following his commands. God has given us his commands for our good.

But even more that, God has promised eternal life to those who believe in him. The Holy Scriptures **“are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** Christians still have to deal with the problems our sins bring – the sadness, the pain, the sickness, the disappointment, and finally death. But Jesus died and rose again to win for us eternal life. Then we’ll have the final salvation, the final rescue from all that troubles us in this life. Our days will truly be many and years will be added to our lives.

Better your life by getting wiser. That’s the promise God gives through Solomon. **“If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”** But this is something for each individual. Each mocker, or unbeliever, will suffer for his own lack of true wisdom. And you can’t believe for someone else. You can’t grow in wisdom for someone else. Each of us is responsible for this ourselves. Each individual will have to stand before God. Therefore, each of us has to ask, “What am I doing to get wiser?”

Solomon was given the gift of wisdom. He had a unique wisdom from God. People came from far away lands to soak up his wisdom. But somewhere along the line, Solomon’s true wisdom was lost. His unbelieving wives influenced him away from God’s Word, although there is evidence that he became wise again later in life. We can lose that wisdom God has given us at our baptism. We can throw away the eternal life Jesus won for us if we stop listening to his Word. We’ll lose that better life. Instead, better your life by getting wiser. Stay in the Word. Grow in your fear of the Lord and your understanding of the Holy One. Receive instruction from the Bible, now and throughout your life. Then, you’ll not only have the beginning of wisdom. You’ll **“be wiser still.”** And **“your wisdom will reward you.”**