

The Sixteenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 4, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Alleluia! (Philippians 4:4)

**Proverbs 9:8-12**

- 8 Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.
- 9 Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.
- 10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
- 11 For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.
- 12 If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”

**Sermon Text:** Proverbs 9:8-12

Did you see it last Monday? I did (because I live on the corner of Wheaton and McEwan). I know some of you saw it too. Either you were driving the car or you were the one entering the building. Do you know what I am talking about? Last Monday was the first day back to school.

School is good (— and no, not just because parents rediscover a treasured sense of peace and freedom). School is good because children will learn new things. They will build on previous knowledge. Knowledge will help them better understand their world. Understanding their world will prepare them for life outside of school. That is why your parents once sent you; that is why they are sending you. Schools unlock new knowledge.

Judging by the weight of your backpack, maybe you know just how much there is to learn. Your backpack holds new math problems, books to boost your reading skills; it holds science and social studies textbooks to unravel the workings of your world. Those books hold incredible amounts of knowledge. They certainly will add to what you already know.

Can your Bible do that— increase your knowledge? Millions of dollars are poured into education— all to ensure you have the best training available. Unfortunately, many believe the Bible offers you nothing more than some general self-help life-advice. Today, you get to learn from the wisest man the world has ever known. His words **UNLOCK TRUE WISDOM!** It all starts by *Fearing the LORD* and it continues by *Growing in the Word*.

That wise teacher is none other than King Solomon. Remember him? His father is the famous Israelite king, David (a distant ancestor of Jesus Christ). Maybe you remember

that Solomon constructed a gorgeous temple with chiseled rock walls and fragrant cedar wood paneling and hammered gold accents. Perhaps the most well known detail about Solomon is that one night God spoke to him in a dream.

In that dream, God promised to give Solomon whatever he asked. Now, as a soon-to-be-king, that would be incredible; Solomon could receive anything! He could ask for world domination or for the heads of his enemies or for all the wealth in the world ([1 Kings 3:11](#)). Out of all the things Solomon could have asked for, he asks for the wisdom to *distinguish between right and wrong* ([1 Kings 3:9](#)).

People crave wisdom, right? We do not want to make mistakes in managing money, so we ask our parents for advice— because, chances are, they already made mistakes. So, we hope they can tell us what pitfalls to avoid so that we do not lose money. Yet, Solomon does not tell you how to get rich. He is not going to give your pointers on raising your children or becoming a happier person. You see, Solomon knows that you can be the wisest person in the entire world, but if your heart is not connected to God, you will lose everything ([Ecclesiastes 2:24-26](#)). That is why Solomon tells you what life is really all about: **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.** If you want to **UNLOCK TRUE WISDOM** for life, it all begins by *fearing the LORD*.

That sounds like an odd place to start. To “fear the LORD?” In our English language, if you “fear” someone, usually that means you are scared or terrified of them. So, being “terrified” of the LORD is where wisdom starts? In a way, yes! Because I am not God and God is not me. I fail people; I deliberately choose to do evil. God never fails people; God never does evil ([James 1:13](#)). He is not some friend who laughs when I break one of God’s commandments. He is the Almighty God who stretched a measuring line across our universe, who shut the sea behind doors, who clothes the skies with clouds, and brings out the sun every morning ([Job 38-41](#)) Your God is the Holy One who lives in heaven— a place reserved only for the perfect! I am not in heaven, but he is.

So, do you find true wisdom from him? Do you respect God enough to trust that he might possibly know what he is talking about? Or do you think you know it all? Do you rely on your own advice when it comes to relationship challenges? Do you trust your own heart when it comes to spending money? Do you take the advice of your friends even though they directly contradict what God so clearly says?

Solomon can easily identify people who trust their own wisdom. He writes: **Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you.** When God’s Word clearly tells you that you are wrong, how do you respond? When God exposes your greediness, do you use every excuse as to why your situation is the exception? When God’s Word reveals the pure self-centeredness of your words and actions, do you fight what the Word says, call it wrong, and run away from it? Those who reject what God has to say really prove that they hate what God says.

That does not sound too wise, does it? Rejecting the Words of the Holy One will line you up with the un-holy one [the devil]!

When it comes to the decisions we must make or the challenges we face, we search for wisdom. Yet, do not overlook the obvious place where wisdom is found. If you want to **UNLOCK TRUE WISDOM**, then start by *fearing the LORD*.

Yes, “fear” means to be scared or terrified. Look at the cross. Are do you tremble at the sight of the wages of sin? On Good Friday afternoon, the sky grows dark. The earth quakes. The Holy One of God is stretched out on the cross.

Jesus— who is wisdom in the flesh— is cast aside as a mocker. His Father in heaven rebukes him and hates him. Jesus’ days are shortened. He suffers— all because of us.

Yet, at the cross, “fear” takes on another meaning. Fear also means “respect.” Look at the cross. See what God accomplishes there. He has wiped away your every self-centered thought, word, and action. He has dressed you in true wisdom.

Through faith you trust Jesus is your Savior from sin. That makes you truly wise because you know what life is all about. You are not going to live 70 or 80 or 90 years, die, and then cease to exist. You are wise enough to know there is a God who reigns in heaven. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to make you wise enough to know that you will live forever in heaven because Jesus is your Savior. That means, the two-year-old who says: “Jesus loves me” is wiser than someone like Stephen Hawking who brags: “There is no God.” Your fear— your respect— at the sight of God’s love for you **UNLOCKS TRUE WISDOM**.

Wisdom does not stop there. *Grow in the Word*. Listen to Solomon’s words again: **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.** You are already the wise person. So, how are you growing in your wisdom today? Notice, Solomon says you continue growing (“*wiser still*”). So, when do you finally know the Bible so well that you can stop hearing it? ... reading it? ... understanding it? Solomon never gives you an end point; he never says when you finally know enough.

Yes, there will be times when you think you know the Bible so well that you have everything before. Yet, if God himself tells you that wisdom comes by hearing the Word, tucking it into your heart, and applying it to your life, then what tells you to find wisdom outside of the Word? Because God does not say that. The devil will try to convince you that the Word offers you nothing. He will tell you that it does not fix your problems or that it is not relevant to your life today. He is lying to you. God cannot make it any clearer: if you want to **UNLOCK TRUE WISDOM**, then *Grow in the Word*.

As you read and hear God’s Word, you will *Grow in the Word*. You will grow wiser still. You will gain better understanding. After all, life changes, right? The things on your mind change. The things in your world affect you differently throughout your life. This year you are going to elect a president of the nation. An 8-year-old simply wants to know the president’s name. An 18-year-old wants a president who actually listens to them. A 28-year-old wants a president to provide jobs. A 48-year-old wants a president to address rising tuition costs. A 68-year-old wants a president to protect retirement savings. An 88-year-old wants a president to keep his hands off of their retirement savings. You have one common challenge, but it affects everyone differently.

Grounded in the Word, you can wisely know God will continue watching over you. God teaches you to trust him, not humanity ([Psalm 118:8-9](#)). God promises to provide for you better than he already provides for birds and flowers ([Matthew 6:25-34](#)). God guarantees that he will be with you until the very end of the age ([Matthew 28:20](#)). So, **UNLOCK TRUE WISDOM** by *growing in the Word*. Because even though you do not know who your next leader will be, you are wise enough to know that no one will replace God.

Earlier you heard me say that Solomon is not writing random proverbs as some kind of self-help book for life. That is true. He holds God as the center of all happiness. Trusting in Jesus as your Savior from sin means that you love him above any other thing. Loving God above any other thing does bring a sense of peace to your life.

Listen to Solomon's closing words. **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.**" If you decide to abuse drugs and alcohol, your days can end shortly. If you and your spouse do not turn to the Bible to see what God wants marriage to be, you will never fully trust each other. If you always rely on your own answers, you will always be stressed. These problems are not God's fault; it is the mocker's fault. God gives his Word. Only mockers scoff at it.

Those who live in line with God's commands will live a longer life. They will not abuse drugs and alcohol and shorten their life. They will not listen to un-Godly advice that rarely helps mend marriage. Stress will decrease because trust is placed in God. Yes, not every Christian lives a long life on earth. Yet, a Christian will live forever in heaven. Continue **UNLOCKING TRUE WISDOM** by *growing in the Word!*

After all, people grow in knowledge, right? Another school year has started. Kids will increase their math knowledge, increase their reading and writing skills, and better understand their world. The knowledge contained in textbooks prepare you for life.

Yet, the book that best prepares you for the fullest life is the book already near and dear to your heart. In the Bible God reveals your Savior from sin. Look to the cross; see what love God poured out to make you his own. As you do, your respect for what God accomplished will increase your understanding of the world.

You will know what life is all about. Right now you are walking the path that leads to eternal life. Never forget this! Remain in the Word to keep you close to God, to increase your trust in God, to remember that God is always in control.

Those are the wisest words the world has ever known— and they are not found in a math or reading or science or social studies book. They are found in the Bible, God's Word that increases your wisdom. Hear it. Read it. And **UNLOCK TRUE WISDOM!** It all starts by *Fearing the LORD* and it continues by *Growing in the Word*.