

## Wisdom and Folly

Listen! Can you hear it? It's a confusing sound, isn't it? It's almost like walking through the market in a big city in foreign country. It sounds like voices. They're trying to get your attention. They're trying to get you to look. If they can get you in the store, there's a good chance they can sell you something. They're calling out, "Turn in here! We have what you need!" You begin to look around. Big, flashy signs are everywhere. Windows are full of things you want and need. You came to buy something. But what's it going to be? The louder the voice, the harder it is to ignore. The fancier the store, the more it draws you in. The better the sale, the more you can get. Will you find something worthwhile?

As we walk along on the way set before us, we have choices to make. Voices call out to us, if you will. Our text this morning sets before us two options. Allow me to put our text into context for you. *"Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. <sup>2</sup> She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. <sup>3</sup> She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, <sup>4</sup> "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says, <sup>5</sup> "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. <sup>6</sup> Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight." ...<sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight...<sup>13</sup> The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. <sup>14</sup> She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, <sup>15</sup> calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, <sup>16</sup> "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, <sup>17</sup> "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." <sup>18</sup> But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol."* There are two calling you. Solomon describes the first as "Wisdom." The second he describes as "Folly." The choice seems easy, doesn't it? Who, in his right mind, would want to choose "Folly" over "Wisdom?" Who wants to be called a fool? No one I know, at least. I'm sure that none of you want to be called fools, either. Unfortunately, things don't happen as we might imagine. They don't turn out like we would hope. People choose folly over wisdom all the time. Why? What's so attractive about folly that it makes people choose to be fools in this world? This morning, we're going to consider Wisdom and Folly side-by-side. On the surface, wisdom and folly look more alike than many of us realize. Deep down, however, they offer very different results. Ultimately, they couldn't be more different.

On the surface, both wisdom and folly appear similar. In our text this morning, both are seeking willing participants. The call goes out from both. Wisdom sends out messengers to call out from the highest places in town. Folly sits up there, too, beckoning you into her house. “Whoever lacks understanding, turn in here!” You hear, the calls, don’t you? They’re all around you. Wisdom and Folly both, calling you to enter into their house. “You, you don’t yet understand, do you? Come on in! I’ll show you what I have to offer!” The louder the voice, the harder it is to ignore. Will you find something worthwhile?

Not only do the calls for attention go out; the offers do, too. “Whoever lacks understanding, turn in here!” Wisdom and Folly, vying for attention, offering understanding. They offer awareness and experience. The text gives the imagery of a feast. Wisdom has slaughtered the beast. She’s mixed some wine. She’s baked some bread. She’s set her table, waiting for someone to come and join the feast. Folly, too, has something to offer the traveler who hungers and thirsts. Delights from far and wide. Seductive food. Exotic drinks. Folly’s feast is hard to turn ignore. You know the scene well, right? You’ve heard the voices of Wisdom and Folly calling. Wisdom has set itself up and wants to teach you its ways. It has much to offer, if you’ll only seek it out. If only there were one choice! Folly, too, calls out to you, distracting you from Wisdom’s call. It has come out to you and set itself up right near you. The offer looks attractive, maybe even more so than Wisdom’s. Folly has something you can experience, and it’s sure hard to turn down.

This is about where the similarities end. On the outside, Wisdom and Folly may not seem too different. They’re both calling out to you, beckoning you as one who lacks understanding and experience. They both set themselves up around you, seeking your attention. They offer to fill that void in your heart. They claim to quench your hunger and thirst. You know that you need something. Will you find something worthwhile?

As you try to discern the voices, one seems much closer to you. It’s loud and direct. It’s attractive, even seductive. “Whoever is without understanding, turn in here!” The call reminds you of television commercial – flashy, loud, fascinating, and charismatic. It’s hard not to turn and look. Temptation to sin is like that, isn’t it? It can be flashy and fascinating. Whatever it is looks like it’s fun and pleasurable. Sometimes, you can’t simply ignore Folly, because it’s right there in your face, enticing you to join. “What are you afraid of? I’ll make it worth your while!”

The call becomes even harder to resist. “Stolen water is sweet! And bread eaten in secret is pleasant!” When Folly calls, it doesn’t hold back. The offer isn’t boring or dull. The promise is for something exciting. Folly offers something that you don’t have. Something pleasurable. Something forbidden. You know what I’m talking about, right? That extra few dollars you can make without anybody knowing. That movie you want to watch when nobody’s around. Those drinks you have after everyone’s gone to bed. Nobody knows about it, right? It’s not hurting anyone. It’s a “victimless crime.” It’s just harmless fun. Don’t be afraid. It may take the pain away.

Folly’s call goes even farther. It doesn’t stop with the offer of stolen water or furtive fruit. You move closer to the source of the call. The voice itself becomes faint, as many other voices get louder. “Come on in and join the fun! Anyone who’s anyone is in here! It’s time to party with us! You don’t know excitement till you’ve partied with us!” It sounds like a party, all right. If everyone else is doing it, why not me? Folly doesn’t shy away from using other people to pressure you. Maybe your friends, maybe even your family, are some of the voices you hear. You might even think, “They seem all right. It won’t hurt me.” And it’s hard to ignore the calls and voices. You want to join in. You want to fit in. You don’t want to miss out on anything. You surely don’t want to be thought of as boring, or dull, or as a prude. What’s to be afraid of? Everyone else is doing it. Isn’t it worthwhile?

It may seem worthwhile at first. The fun. The excitement. The mysteriousness. The pleasure. It may even seem better than you had imagined. But if you stay, if you continue, things don’t stay the same, do they? What was a lively party becomes a depressing situation. What seemed like a lively group becomes a lonely reality. The pleasure can no longer cover the pain. Life itself seems to be up in the air. Do you understand why Solomon describes the situation as he does? “But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.” You hear the call of a lively party. The only problem is that all the partiers are dead. Not on the outside. They’re still breathing and moving. But Folly has stolen the lives from the people who heed her call. Those who choose Folly become like the living dead, like zombies in a lonely world. All that’s left is fear. Indeed, Folly can lead you nowhere else than the grave. Its feast is but an empty promise, a meal that will never fill your hungry soul.

How then can anyone live? How can we survive the siren’s call of Folly? How can we avoid death and the grave forever? Listen again. Amid the loud and obnoxious call of Folly,

you can hear it. It may be faint. It may be clear. But it's there. Another voice calls you. It beckons you to come and join. Wisdom is calling. Wisdom, too, has prepared a feast for you. The table is set. The beast is slaughtered. The wine is mixed. The bread is baked. Wisdom is waiting. There's still a void that you need filled. Perhaps it's even bigger than before. There's no promise of mysterious excitement or stolen bread. But the meal's there. Is it worthwhile?

Solomon says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is insight." It's simply not as attractive, is it? To fear the LORD means to forsake the ways of the world. These things Paul repeats in our Epistle lesson. He calls these deeds "works of darkness" and "shameful," things like sexual immorality, drunkenness, impurity, covetousness, and crude joking. These are the things found at Folly's feast. Wisdom's feast has none of these things. But Folly's feast offers empty promises. It leads to death. The feast of Wisdom has food to fill the soul. With Wisdom comes life. "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever *feasts* on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.'" This is the voice of wisdom and understanding. The voice of Jesus Christ, of whom Isaiah said, "And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the *fear of the LORD*. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD." To fear the Lord, to be wise, is to turn away from worldly things and heed the voice of Christ. Christ, the pillar and cornerstone of Wisdom's house. Christ, who himself was slaughtered on the cross. Christ, whose blood was mixed with that of criminals on the cross. Christ, whose resurrection made foolish the wisdom of the world.

So come, those of you who seek to be filled with wisdom and understanding. Come to the feast! See, Wisdom's house has been built around you. See, the table has been set for you. The lamb has been slaughtered. The wine has been poured. The bread has been baked. The voice of Wisdom can't be ignored. "Come, eat of my bread! Drink of the wine I have mixed! Leave your foolish ways and live, and walk in the ways of insight!" "Come! Eat my flesh and drink my blood! This bread is my body, and this wine is my blood! Come and feast, and I will give you life! Eat, that you might live forever!" Wisdom's voice is calling. Come to the feast!

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