

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 15

August 16, 2009

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

Wisdom: A Voice that Calls to Us

A summertime memory that many of us share is connected to county and state fairs. Remember the smell of popcorn, cakes, corn dogs, pigs, horses, and cows? Can you recall the lights, the midway rides, the concerts, the displays, and the perfectly-preserved jams and vegetables? And imagine again the sounds: cows mooing; children laughing; friends calling your name; and the folks at the game tables and booths for give-aways.

Those folks would spend hour after hour, calling out for any passerby to “try your luck” at a game table...to sample the newest flavor of soft drink ...to invite you into the booth “to see something you’ve never seen before”...to sit on the newest model of tractor for every farm owner...to demonstrate an amazing new kitchen knife that can cut through wood...or to sell you a collection of music that every music owner must own. Their voices were usually booming and resounded throughout the aisles of displays and demonstrations, calling us to some action or response. Voices that, row-after-row and summer-after-summer, we had the right to ignore, to obey, to question, to ridicule, or even to mock.

One of the most intriguing elements of the book of Proverbs is the personification of Wisdom, a literary feature in which Wisdom is given human abilities and characteristics. Especially in chapters 8 and 9, the Wisdom of the LORD is not an abstract concept...but a woman. A woman who “stands by the city gate where everyone enters the city, and she shouts ‘I am calling out to each one of you!’” (Proverbs 8:3,4, *CEV*).

In the lectionary reading from the same book for today, Lady Wisdom is given even more human abilities: she has built her house (9:1); she has prepared the meat and set out the wine (2); and she has sent out her servant women with a task (3). What does this Lady Wisdom want from us, calling as she does to everyone who can hear her voice? The texts from Proverbs are clear: Lady Wisdom wants us to embrace her truth, her honesty, her knowledge, her understanding...and to turn from our foolishness, our ignorance, our shallowness, our lies.

And therein lies our choice, the choice between two options which are clear in the readings from Proverbs, Psalms, Ephesians, and from John’s Gospel: we can choose God and be granted

wisdom, worth, life, happiness. Or, we can ignore God and be left with foolishness, destruction, death, and despair.

Whatever choice we made back then in response to the voices of those who worked the booths and games at county fairs, carnivals, and summer festivals, let us now pay heed to the voice of Lady Wisdom. Listen! We hear her voice loud and clear not once, but throughout our lives...amid struggles, confusions, doubts, uncertainties, temptations, dark passages of life: “If you want to live, give up your foolishness and let understanding guide your steps.” (9:6, *CEV*)

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Steve Berneking, Ph.D., who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Manager of the Translation Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: **Uganda** – With thanks to God for progress with the Runyoro/Rutooro, Runyankore/Rukiga, and Lumasaaba translation projects, and with prayers for the typesetting and quality checking stages and for translators for the Lusamia/Lugwe project; **Rwanda** – With thanks to God for the relaunching of all projects and for the translation of two Children’s Bibles into Kinyarwanda, and with prayers for funds to print these two Bibles and for the translation and printing of the Kinyarwanda Study Bible and for the funding for the construction of a new Bible House; **Burundi** – With thanks to God for the growth of Bible work in that country despite various difficulties, and with thanks to God for protecting the staff while promoting Bible work and distributing the Scriptures, and with prayers for the publication of the revised Bibliya Yera, the completion of the Catholic Kirundi translation, and for lasting peace and for God’s Word to transform people’s lives.

Activity Corner: “Wisdom” Acrostic Prayer

Supplies needed: Bible; newsprint and marker and/or writing paper and pens or pencils; drawing paper and crayons for young children (optional).

On a sheet of newsprint (and/or on individual sheets of paper for each participant), write the word WISDOM in large letters vertically. Read Psalm 34:9-14, Proverbs 9:1-6, and Ephesians 5:15-20 and discuss the words of “wisdom” found in these three passages. On a separate sheet of newsprint, note what these passages teach. Using the letters from the word WISDOM, compose a prayer of thanksgiving to God and in praise of wisdom so that each line begins with the letters W-I-S-D-O-M. Use the prayer throughout the week during devotional time. Younger children may be encouraged to draw a picture that depicts Proverbs 6:1-9. Conclude by singing one of your favorite hymns or songs of praise (as per the instruction given in Ephesians 5:19).