

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 5:1-11
20 July, Anno Domini 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved of Christ,

The Word of God before us today invites us to meditate on wisdom - particularly the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man. It is imperative for our salvation that we know the distinction between the two and their proper order because, as King Solomon says, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” and twice warns us “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” (Proverbs 14:14, 16:25)

It is a plague among sinners that we imagine that we are wise. Everyone is quick to voice an opinion, whether they are familiar with the topic or not. Far fewer are humbly willing to learn. Consider Peter on the Sea of Galilee. He was the expert. He, not Jesus, was the one who made his living fishing. He knew the best times and the best places to fish. He had mastered the techniques that were taught to him by the masters that came before him and he was doing well enough to support his family. What did this teacher, this carpenter, this miracle worker know about fishing?

Now, to be fair to Peter, AS FAR AS HE WAS ABLE TO KNOW, he was correct. God has given us our reason to be able to learn and understand these things. Jesus said “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens.” (Lk. 12:54-55) Reason is a gift from God that is to be used to glorify God and serve your neighbor. It is to be nurtured and developed. It is to be protected from evil. Children, this is why you receive an education. You need to learn about God’s creation. You need to learn how creation works and the purposes which God has given to the things which He created. You need to learn your place in creation. Reading, science, math, logic, music, history - all of these different disciplines of study have the very specific purpose of making you truly wise in the world which is to say that you recognize, love, and live within the order God has established and set forth in His Word. God is pleased and glorified by TRULY wise parents, pastors, teachers, rulers, builders, mechanics, judges, doctors, soldiers and a whole host of other things.

And it is quite amazing to think about all things we are able to know. We can see tremendous distances out into the universe. We can observe things going on in the microscopic cells of our body. We are able to send messages to people around the world in the blink of an eye. And until our Lord returns, we will continue to learn more and more about things we know and maybe even things we don't yet know anything about. Bless the Lord who has blessed us with such an amazing capacity to learn and understand the world around us!

But if we consider our first parents, Adam and Eve, even our knowledge of earthly things has grown quite dark and perverted. Our first parents had a complete understanding of the world, how things worked, and the purposes for which God had made them. This is how Adam gave names to all the creatures. Adam and Eve delighted in not only the individual things God had made but how all of those things, including themselves, had been placed in a perfect order and relationship to one another. They had the fullest of earthly wisdom because their understanding of the things of creation was coupled with a perfect fear, love, and trust in God. They understood and loved the way in which God had created them and the stations in which He had placed them. They saw and understood and delighted in the perfect harmony and order of all of creation. They understood that the highest good of everything in creation, including themselves, was to live in God's order. That is what God saw when He looked at all that He had made and declared it to be very good. Nothing was disordered. Nothing was incomplete. Everything submitted itself to God and His good design joyfully and willingly.

So what has happened? Everything changed when Satan sowed the first seeds of discontent in Eve's ears and invited her to think that she knew, or at least should know, more than she actually did. He suggested that God's order was not good and that she was capable of knowing as God knows - being like God. And she and her husband who was with her swallowed the lie hook, line, and sinker. They tried to place their thoughts above God's thoughts which only made them utter fools and cast them and all of humanity and all of creation under the dark, corrupting, confusing, disordering shadow of death. The man of clay thought he knew more and better than the Divine Potter who had fashioned him. The order fell into disorder. Disorder meant dissatisfaction. Adam sought to accuse God of failing in His creation of Eve. Eve sought to blame the serpent for her insolence. Now, instead of harmony there was division. Instead of unity there was hatred. Man sought to dominate woman and woman sought to take headship from man. Brother would rise against brother in murderous rage. Marriage was perverted. Homes full of children were scoffed at. Man imagines that he evolved from a random explosion. Man's wisdom attempts to rationalize such evil and demonic things as

abortion and assisted suicide. Men still to this day enslave one another. Vast numbers of people can suddenly be convinced that male and female don't exist and that mutilating mentally ill and confused people is loving. How many husbands have cheated on their wives and left their children and no one bats an eyelash? How many people are enslaved to gambling and drugs and pornography and work and video games? And if our reason is so weak and corrupted by sin that we cannot even clearly think about these things, what possible chance could it have to understand eternal things and the wisdom of the holy and almighty God? Even creation itself was set out of order. Floods, earthquakes, and droughts. Creation, rather than submitting to man's headship rose up against him, producing thorns and thistles instead of bountiful crops. And the animals that Adam once understood and cared for, now opened their mouths against him to harm him. There was no contentedness, no peace, no order. People would relentlessly seek to live outside the order and purpose for which they were created, still foolishly imagining that they knew a better way. But the end of man's way is always and only death.

Just consider your own way in light of the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you followed God's wisdom and carried out the divinely instituted obligations of these stations to uphold God's order? Do you even know your duties? Or have followed your own wisdom, neglecting your duties and contributing to the disorder?

The truth is that we have all contributed to the chaos and disorder. We have all sought after our own way, imagining that we know better than God. We have confused the foolishness of our own wisdom with the wisdom of God. We have tried to make our thoughts His thoughts and our ways His ways, twisting His commandments to suit our needs and desires. "I can't reconcile with THAT person." "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian." "The church just wants my money." "I can't confront my children in their sin. They might not talk to me anymore." When we speak and think these things we are imagining that we are wiser than God, that, like Peter, we are the ones who know how things really work. This is when man's wisdom reaches beyond its boundaries and we join the ranks of those who are perishing because the cross has become folly to us.

While man may accumulate a great deal of knowledge and wisdom in earthly things, our wisdom is the utter depths of foolishness when it comes to divine, heavenly, eternal things. Indeed, the cross of Jesus Christ as our source of life and salvation is foolishness, madness to those enamored with themselves and their own understanding, their own wisdom, their own righteousness. What could possibly be more foolish than God sending His beloved Son to suffer an excruciating and

humiliating death under completely false accusations in order to save the very people of whom those accusations are unequivocally true? What store owner would go to prison for the person who robbed him? What mother would suffer the death penalty in order to spare the man who murdered her child? Insanity!

But that is precisely the wisdom of God! And only those who have been brought to the realization that their wisdom is foolishness can see the pierced and bloodied Son of God on the cross and marvel in its wisdom. Without it, we poor sinners would have no hope. Because the reality is that either God saves us by suffering our death and His own wrath against sin Himself, or we never in thought, word, or deed sin against the Divine Word from the moment of our conception to the moment of our death - no anger, perfect love, no doubt, cheerful generosity, unwavering patience, hatred for evil, constant in prayer, perfectly unselfish. But you know such a person doesn't exist because everyone born of flesh is flesh, that is, is corrupt, brought forth from corrupted seed, turned completely against God, sold into the slavery of sin. It is the height of folly, then, to look anywhere except Jesus Christ and Him crucified for help and salvation.

Peter needed to be taught the limits of his wisdom and who it was who standing in his boat giving him fishing instructions. To do that, Peter's foolishness and pride had to be put to death. He humored Jesus but didn't take him too seriously. That was a mistake. But Jesus, in His mercy, quickly put Peter's wisdom in its proper place. Jesus didn't just get lucky. He didn't even just know that there were fish there. Jesus PUT the fish there to be caught, to fill Peter's nets and begin to drag the nets, the boats, and the fishermen to down into the depths of the sea to be drowned and die. Jesus is He who said on the fifth day of creation "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures." And at His speaking it was so. Jesus drowned Peter's foolishness there in the Sea of Galilee by forcing him to stare death in face. Suddenly Peter's wisdom became foolishness and he was left with nothing but his sins standing before God and eternal judgment. His wisdom. His income. His reputation. His appearance. His schedule. His good works. His family. None of it mattered because none of it could save him. There was only one option left for Peter, the only real option any of us have when confronted by the incontrovertible reality that we are in fact nothing more than sinful men of clay who ought to be cast into the deepest depths of hell with our nets full of sin. He fell down on his knees and confessed "I am an unclean man, O Lord."

Here we see the boundary of man's wisdom. Whether it was his expertise in fishing or understanding of the ancient philosophers - all of it was useless, even foolish. Because none of it could cover or take away Peter's guilt. No amount of

justifying could excuse Peter's sins. There is no earthly wisdom that can justify man before God. Even worse, Peter was telling the one person who could help him to go away and thereby drown! Now, according to man's wisdom, Peter was probably a fairly upright man whom the world judged as godly and worthy of eternal life. Nothing but a lie. A delusion. Before God who is pure holiness, even the best of man's works condemn him, show him completely lacking in righteousness and holiness. Have you taken comfort in your efforts? Have you praised yourself or even breathed a sigh of relief that you aren't like the murderers, the pedophiles, or the terrorists of the world? Have you taken credit for your success or thought that because you aren't having to live under a bridge and beg strangers for food, God is more pleased with you? Conversely, do you use your afflictions as proof that God is pleased with you, taking pride that you have born the burden of the day and the scorching heat unlike those people who don't volunteer as much as you or give as much as you or come to church as much as you or have as many hardships as you?

We think these things because we try to apply earthly wisdom to salvation. But earthly wisdom is rooted in the law - do well and you will be rewarded; do bad and you will be punished. This wisdom has its place as we must live and interact with one another. God instituted the governing authorities as Paul states clearly to punish those who do evil and reward those who do good. As I said above, we are to cultivate the minds (and bodies) that God has given us to properly care for creation according to God's order and purposes and to benefit our neighbor. But even this wisdom, as far as it goes, remains corrupted by sin.

As St. Paul says to the church at Corinth, a culture obsessed with wisdom and knowledge, "The natural person (that is man without the Holy Spirit and thinking only as the flesh is able to think) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually (or by the Spirit) discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14) In confessing the truth of original sin, the writers of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession write "We are right when we say that [original sin] includes concupiscence, which seeks fleshy things contrary to God's Word. This means when it seeks not only the pleasure of the body, but also **fleshy wisdom and righteousness**. Therefore, it holds God in contempt when it trust in these as good things... Thomas Aquinas says: 'Original sin includes the loss of original righteousness, and with this a **disorderly arrangement of the parts of the soul...**'" (ApAC II, 26-27) Thus the Holy Spirit, preaching the full weight of the Divine Law, must crush the wisdom of man into powder and expose it not only as a little off but entirely wrong in matters of salvation. In love and in His desire for our salvation, God gives us a taste of hell's

terror - the reality of our sin and our complete inability to make ourselves pleasing and righteous before God. He mercifully does this so that the idol of our wisdom is deposed from the throne of our hearts. "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20) This truth is contrary to our reason and so it is the content of every false teaching under the sun - every pagan religion, every atheist philosophy, the teaching of the papacy that works of satisfaction invented by men must be performed in order to pay for sin, the teaching of those who reject the substance and saving power of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper and replace them with our decisions and our obedience. All these would have us believe that Peter should have proudly stood before Jesus and offered to the Lord his sin-blackened heart and the putrid pile of his good works expecting Jesus to reward Peter with eternal life. Only the fool who would dare stare into the Divine Law and insist that he has kept it with his whole heart, soul, body, and mind could imagine such nonsense.

Thanks be to God, with this confession of not only his sin, but most importantly that Jesus is Lord, which confessions were brought forth from Peter's mouth and heart by the working of the Holy Spirit, Peter was on his way out of the pit of foolishness. But one thing remained - the folly of the cross: "Do not be afraid, Peter." What more unreasonable but beautiful thing could God say to this man kneeling in terror before Him, hopelessly crushed by the enormity of his own guilt with no where to hide and no excuse left to be made?! God forgives sinners - freely out of His grace and mercy. Peter didn't deserve it. I don't deserve it. You don't deserve it. But God does it. That is heavenly wisdom which is hated the world over by those who trust in the folly of their own righteousness. God so loved a world filled with sinners who hated His Word, His love, and His creation that He sent His only Son to wrap himself in our flesh, to become one of us. And upon His beloved Son, the Father laid all of our sin, all of our foolishness, all of our mad rebellion and then poured out upon Him all of His wrath and judgment against our sin in order that we would be set free from death. We didn't ask for it and in our sin we didn't even want it. That didn't matter to God. That is the wisdom of God. Punish the innocent so that the guilty rebels could be set free and be made beloved sons and heirs of eternal life.

It is this wisdom which has saved you, wisdom which is folly to those who are perishing still imagining that they are wise and righteous. It is this wisdom which has chosen precisely us who are not really considered wise by worldly standards or powerful or of noble birth and washed us in Holy Baptism, robing you in His glorious and perfect righteousness, and filled you with the true wisdom which comes down from above. It is this wisdom which proclaims the word of the cross

and so destroys the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning. It is this wisdom which elected you from before the foundation of the world to believe the folly of the cross and to glory in the Son of God who was born of the Virgin Mary and died under the world's wisdom precisely to conquer death, break the seal of the tomb, and ascend to the throne of heaven. It is this wisdom which took plain bread and declared with all clarity that it is His true Body which He has given for you to eat. This same wisdom took the cup after supper and said with perfect clarity that it was His Blood of the new covenant by which your sins are forgiven for you to drink. And understand, Jesus, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, doesn't just have wisdom, He IS the wisdom of God wrapped in human flesh. "To those who are called," you, brothers and sisters in Christ, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Therefore, beloved of God, true wisdom is to cast the golden crown of all your works and wisdom at the pierced feet of Jesus and proclaim that to Him alone, the crucified one, belong all glory, honor, power, and might. It is to die to yourself, to count every earthly gain as loss, to rejoice in your sufferings, to boast of your weaknesses, to receive Holy Scripture as the fountain and source of all truth. True wisdom is to take every thought captive to Christ, to walk in humility according to the stations in which God has placed you, to forgive and have mercy upon those, like yourself, who don't deserve it. True wisdom is to boldly confess your sins to Jesus because He has shown you that the wisdom of God is to freely take from repentant sinners the guilt of all their sin through the Blood of Jesus. Do not be afraid.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace and wisdom of God which pass all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

