

Sermon 2007 Pentecost 14 (Proper 17)
Text: Proverbs 25:2-10
Theme: "Saving Wisdom"

The text for the sermon is from Proverbs this morning and because it is poetry, I think the best way to handle it is to take it apart and look at it piece by piece. The psalmist begins:

**It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out.
As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth,
so the heart of kings is unsearchable.**

We do not understand everything that God understands, and while this section might be specifically addressed to an earthly king, remember that, at this time, the king was the person called specifically by God to lead his people according to God's will. We, by virtue of our adoption through the cross, are all kings and queens, so it is our calling to seek to understand as much as we can about God. We are not called to sit idly and watch life go by. We are called to jump in head first and grab life. One of the redeeming moments for the movie "Animal House" was when Dean Wormer said to Flounder, "Fat, drunk, and stupid is no way to go through life, son." There are

many times I feel like saying the same thing to Christians – and sometimes I have said it in so many words.

**Take away the dross from the silver,
and the smith has material for a vessel;
take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in righteousness.**

It is the dross of life that causes all the problems. Dross is a mass of solid impurities floating on a molten metal bath. The silversmith has to skim off the dross before he can pour the silver, otherwise there would be big chunks of rock in the silver. That's what our sin does. It puts big chunks of gunk in our lives. Don't bother justifying and explaining your sin. I have confidence that you have a fabulous reason for every sin you commit. Just know that every sin is dross and regardless of how wonderful you think you feel after you're done – all you have done is add chunks of gunk to the silver.

**Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence
or stand in the place of the great,
for it is better to be told, "Come up here,"
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.**

Bottom line; don't overestimate yourself. We have a remarkable tendency to truly believe that everything is about us. We think that every unpleasant thing that happens is somehow punishment for a sin we committed. Or we think that every unkind thing a person says is somehow meant personally for us. Or we think that we are somehow responsible for the happiness of every person in our sphere of influence or we think that everyone is thinking of us. The truth is, usually, it's not about you – and when it is, someone will be sure to tell you.

Our lives on this earth are about serving God and serving others. As much as we might like to think that God is all worked up over whatever comparatively minor drama is playing out in our lives at any given moment; that is our fantasy. He doesn't get caught in our spokes; God has far bigger fish to fry. There are millions who do not know him. The dross leads us to center life on all the little dramas as though that were the main thing. No! Those little dramas are just bug guts on the windshield. Remember how when you were young, and you got all tied up in knots over some silly problem that you look back on now and laugh about? That's how our problems are to God. What we so often focus on is nothing but drivel. The real problem in

life is the people who have little or no relationship with God and figuring out how to reach out to them and also how to strengthen each other to better reach out to them is what is important.

Everything else is dross. Do you think that you're better, holier, more worthy than another? Dross. Or are you consumed with being less than others in some way? Dross. Do you hurt other people to satisfy yourself or wallow in the hurt someone has handed you? Dross. Do you put God second to make money or play sports or relax or do you act as though doing your duty to God is worthy of some sort of medal? Dross. Dross. Dross. That is not how Kings live. Go sit at the end of the table. Better yet, go sit outside.

What your eyes have seen

**do not hastily bring into court,
for what will you do in the end,
when your neighbor puts you to shame?
Argue your case with your neighbor himself,
and do not reveal another's secret,
lest he who hears you bring shame upon you,
and your ill repute have no end.**

Eighth Commandment friends. God intends for us to live in peace and harmony with each other. The dross we produce fractures that peace and harmony. So do what you need to do to clean up the dross and fix the fracture. Implicit in this directive is the Gospel truth that it can be done. Our stubbornness and pride may make it more difficult to do, but it can be done because we have been given the power of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God has power in and of itself. The body and blood of Christ, fill us up and strengthen us and literally clean the dross off. So when the big, sinful chunks get in our way, we may not want to work it out, but we can. And, if we do, we will see those big chunks fall away. That is the power of God. It works every time.

So that's Proverbs 25, a little bit of poetry from King Solomon with a whole lot to say about being the children of God. It is no easy business. It never has been. But, if we remember the power we have been given and use it to get rid of the dross, a great many things fall into place for us. Amen.