

Build on the Rock

Proverbs 4:10-18

I Peter 2:4-10

It's surprising how much stuff it takes to spend parts of three days at Camp Pyoca. Pillows, bedding, changes of clothes, toiletries, a cap for my bald head, medications, the Bible and my current spy novel, guitar, song sheets for everybody, and more. I felt rather proud of myself for remembering it all...except the communion elements. "No problem!" I thought, "Brownstown has a little grocery store." So we drove into town and walked the aisles. Did you know you cannot find unsliced bread or good old-fashioned grape juice in Brownstown, Indiana? So I bought some English muffins and a packet of grape Koolaid "squeeze its". During communion I poured some Koolaid into a cereal bowl and placed an English muffin on a plate. People came forward and "ripped and dipped" chunks of muffin in the liquid. It worked fine.

Necessity *is* the mother of invention. When the need arises we can improvise solutions that, if not as good as the original plan, do suffice. Necessity is the mother of invention is an English proverb, and quite an old one at that. The earliest known documentation of it goes back to 1519, though its author, William Horman, actually wrote "The mother of invention is necessity" Throughout the 14th to the 18th centuries, in both England and America, people collected proverbs in little home-made folios, or books. Christopher Marlowe and Ben Franklin were among those who did this, with

Franklin's collection running into the thousands.

The Book of Proverbs is a collected book of proverbs. Collected over several centuries by unknown editors, the Proverbs became a highly respected book even before the rabbis decided to add it to the Old Testament. Its primary theme is wisdom. Wisdom was also a primary theme of Hebrew life. Wise men wrote and collected proverbs about wisdom. Many of those who could read collected them. The Hebrews called the books of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon Wisdom Literature. They fill about one-fourth of the Old Testament, proving how important they thought wisdom was. Mothers and fathers would use proverbs to teach their sons and daughters how to live, what was most important in life, how to live as a family and much more. Our passage today repeatedly speaks about wisdom, learning, instruction. Taking the path they pave through life empowers people to avoid evil. Take the path of uprightness, of righteousness.

Though we differ from the ancient Hebrews in profound ways, solid moral and ethical principles have not changed through time. The Proverbs can therefore instruct and guide us. What would it mean for us to follow the path of uprightness? It would mean turning to Jesus' preaching, and to any number of other reliable sources, for the guidance we need. I have found over the years that almost all churches have truly wise people in them. Female and male, young and old (though mostly older as wisdom tends to take time to develop), these are people I listen to. They have a spirit about them, a spirit of humility, intelligence and authentic sympathy for others.

This church has several wise guys and gals. I would never embarrass them by naming them from the pulpit, but they're here. If you have spent much time at Central, I bet you can think of one or more of the people I have in mind. Seek their counsel. Heed it. I have made many mistakes across the course of my career—among them not admitting to myself I needed guidance until long after I should have learned this lesson. Somewhere along the line I did. And ever since my wise advisers have prevented me from making even more mistakes.

Our passage from I Peter speaks about another common biblical theme: the rock that the builders rejected has become the foundation for God's marvelous works. Psalms and prophets speak of this; so did Jesus, who clearly saw it as applying to himself. Here, Peter also applies it to Jesus. He writes, "Come to *him*, to that living stone, rejected by humanity but in God's sight chosen and precious." What's more, when we walk down the path that Jesus has prepared for us we become living stones. We become parts of the foundation of his body on earth, the church. This seems foolish to many. When Jesus predicted he would rebuild his body in three days, he stood in the Temple grounds. His hearers naturally thought he was claiming he could rebuild that massive edifice in three days. They mocked him and called him a fool.

Peter refers to these opponents of Jesus. They are the ones who stumble and fall when they trip up on the rock. They are the ones who think they deserve the places of highest glory in Jewish society. After all, they studied the Law and the Prophets. They run the religious schools. They got elected to the Sanhedrin, the

Jewish council second only to the Romans in political power. But writing with the benefit of hindsight, Peter sees that Jesus' prophecy has come true. Peter believes Jesus came back from the dead. Peter has received the power of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. By the time of this writing, Peter has evangelized, bringing thousands to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. What seemed foolish has proven wise. In a complete reversal, Jesus has built his body into a growing force. That body remains the largest religion on the planet.

In Peter's mind we who belong to it are a chosen people. This is a deeply Jewish way of thinking. But our collective identity relies on our faith, not our genetic code. Whereas God had once chosen the Hebrews to be his (one) people, in Jesus God has chosen everybody who comes to him. And we are a royal priesthood. We need no human priests. The function of a priest was and is to be the go between people and God. In Christ, we can go between and get all the way to him. We are God's own people, a point Peter will make a third time in the next verse. He concludes with the wonderful words, "Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." Grateful for mercy—for we all make mistakes as we work through the years—we can find the freedom and the spiritual energy to join in the work of building the Body of Christ, and participate in its work.

Acquire wisdom. Walk with Jesus. Now there's a proverb for you.