



January 9, 2022

Raquette Lake Chapel Sunday Blast

“The Book of Proverbs is Garbage”

Imagine my surprise when I read this article title in my email this week: the author (a preacher) claimed:

“[Proverbs] is full of dubious wisdom. ‘Follow the rules and you’ll be rewarded. Suffering is for the Stupid. If you lose your good name, you’re sunk.’ Reading Proverbs, I wonder, what world is this person living in?! Not the one where bad things happen to good people and wealth has no correlation to virtue. Reading Proverbs I wonder, what God is this person worshipping? Not the one who hears the cries of the suffering ...”

I did not delete the email uttering unkind words. Rather it reminded me of two points about reading scripture in general: (1) we should not focus on Bible verses only because they support our opinions, while ignoring verses that do not; and (2) theologians urge us to read and try to understand God’s revelation in the entire Bible (a tough task I know).

The Writer Quoted These “Garbage” Proverbs [22:1,3-4]

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. The clever see danger and hide; but the simple go on, and suffer for it. The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. - Proverbs 22:1, 3-4 (NRSV)

These are three proverbs, not one, not connected ideas. Let’s look at the first proverb:

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

I struggle to find this “dubious wisdom.” Growing up and living in smaller communities has proven to me that a person’s reputation, their “name,” is extremely important, and to have people’s trust and respect is essential to living well in community with others. That trust and respect is built on actions more than words. It takes a lot of time and work to gain “a good name” and only one misstep to lose it.

When we put proverbs like this into practice, we begin to learn what “Wisdom” is. We should ask ourselves: what proverbs do we live by? How do we use them, to make decisions and take actions, or to try to justify our decisions and actions after the fact?

A final comment. I paraphrase Fr. Joseph Koterski in his book Biblical Wisdom Literature: *If a proverb seems outdated, or trivial, or irrelevant, we probably don’t understand what the proverb is trying to teach us, and it may take us awhile to get it!* “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.” We should take the path of humility and awe – “the fear” – of God. AMEN!

Special prayers this week: for the victims of the fires in Colorado; for the victims of the pandemic; healing for Elizabeth. Hear our prayers O Lord!
