

You've all seen the warnings on alcohol and tobacco products telling you this product may be hazardous to your health. Perhaps today's sermon should have a label, "This sermon may be hazardous to your understanding of God." Hopefully hazardous in a good way and not a destructive way.

This is actually a very common theme throughout the Bible about God, but one that is often overshadowed by other thoughts. We turn to our first reading from Proverbs and come across a very interesting text. On the surface this passage is confusing, if not angering. Wisdom is personified as a woman who has built a house. You get this interesting but seemingly pointless architectural detail that the house has seven pillars. Wisdom then sends her servants out to invite the simple and senseless in for a party. But somehow as these simple and senseless people eat and drink they are supposed to grow up. I don't know about you, but I don't associate partying when there is lots of food and wine available with people acting mature. Is this some sort of a bait and switch maneuver on woman wisdom's part? Is she going to tell people they are coming to a

party but as soon as they arrive she puts them in a classroom for a lecture on mature behavior?

No, there's something else going on here. In those days it was common to throw a house warming party when you've built a new house. The same sort of thing happens today. When you've built a new house you're happy and proud of it. You've done a lot of work, and maybe shed some blood, sweat and tears, but you're glad it's over. When you've moved in you plan a party and invite your friends and relatives to show it off. Proverbs is building on that idea.

And about that house and building a house, let's go back to that bizarre architectural detail about the seven pillars. You probably know that the number seven is a special number in many cultures, and ancient Jews were no different. Seven was a number that symbolized wholeness and completeness. Many ancient Middle Eastern cultures believed that the world was held up by seven pillars. And that might give us a little insight into this; except instead of seven, let's say six-plus-one.

In the first creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 how many days does creation take? Six-plus-one days. There are six days of labor and one day of rest. In the first three verses of our Proverbs text look at what happens. There are six-plus-one actions. The six actions of wisdom are: built house, hewn pillars, slaughtered animals, mixed wine, set table, sent out servant girls. And notice something about these verses. They are all talking about things wisdom has done in the past. In Hebrew those six verbs are all past tense.

Now look at the seventh action. She calls from the highest places in the town, and she calls out to the people around. Do you notice the change in verb tense? This is no longer something that happened in the past. This is present tense. It is happening now. Hebrew scholars say it is the "present-continuous tense."

And so, six days in creation, six actions preparing for the party. Seventh day of creation is a day of rest. Creation is completed. Seventh action is an ongoing invitation to the party.

This six-plus-one bit isn't unique to Proverbs 9. That pattern happens twice in Proverbs 8 too. And again, it is referring to creation. Wisdom has six actions of creation. The seventh is one of joy.

Now if your mind is jumping to conclusions about this you are right to do so. Wisdom, although personified as a woman here, is an image for God and God's act of creation. The previous chapters in Proverbs have been all about God creating.

Then look to the gospel reading. We are still in the Bread of Life Discourse. The Bread of Life Discourse always comes off sounding more serious than I think Jesus intended. It is really full of humorous misunderstanding in order to teach us about God's grace. It may not be laugh out loud funny, but it is playful. Since the gospel writer John links the ideas of Word, wisdom, creation, and Jesus all together - and the Bread of Life Discourse is about bread and wine and nourishment from God - well you can put the picture together.

God created the world and then has invited humans to come and party with him in this wonderful world. Life is a banquet, a party, and you are God's invited guest.

Why do so many people have such a hard time understanding God this way? People had a hard time in Jesus' day. They criticized him for having too much fun. Before Jesus things were the same way. You'll remember God saying, "I hate, I despise your solemn assemblies."

It is so easy for people to envision God as stern and judgmental. A person can piously worship God for the sacrifice of the crucifixion and think such piety is what God wants/demands. It is another thing to realize that God's generosity is ongoing.

Is God too generous, too loving for our taste? Is salvation too easy - so people make it hard? What is wrong with a God who builds a house, then wants to throw a party? Why do so many people have such a hard time with God actually being fun and cool? Last week I said how come when we see a picture of a monk praying we have no trouble thinking "reverence," but we

can't imagine reverence when we a picture of a surfer riding a wave? Is not the wave God's good creation too?

We are in the Bread of Life Discourse which talks about Holy Communion. Communion means lots of things to lots of people. And while I in no way want to sound judgmental to the spiritual nourishment people receive when Communion is taken in a very solemn fashion, if that is the only way we celebrate we are missing its party aspect. It is bread and wine - a meal - a banquet for us to enjoy.

God has made a house. It is the world. And God has thrown a house warming party and invited you to it. I know that not every day is sunshine and daisies. There are hardships and unfair things and pains. Not all of it can be explained. But God's desire is for you to know wholeness, rightness and lasting contentment. That's God's ongoing work for you. Rejoice and be glad in God's eternal grace for us all. Amen