



Growing up, I was convinced the pastor was the wisest person who walked the entire face of the earth. For it was the pastor who had the most direct line of access to the Almighty God: the all-powerful, all-knowing, fullest-of-wisdom God, who had blessed the clergy with the sacred responsibility to pass along holy bits and pieces of such wisdom to the rest of us mere mortals. That image may have been slightly

exaggerated for me during my youth as my home church altar, like for many faith communities, was pushed up against the wall. So, when the pastor prayed (and only the pastor lead the prayers!), and also, when the pastor prepared holy Communion, he would face that high and mighty altar, with his back facing the rest of us mere mortals. Not only that, but in the church where I grew up, only the pastor wore the white robe. It almost came off to me as a superhero cape, of sorts. That he was our in-the-flesh Batman or Superman taking on the forces of sin and death on our behalf. Evidently, I thought so highly of our pastor during my younger years that I actually referred to him as God a few times.

The closest I ever got to the one wearing a clerical collar was during Confirmation, when we middle schoolers felt as if we were being ushered into the inner circle of the Lutheran wisdom passed down through the generations. It may not the smartest thing for me to admit out loud, but I will be the first to admit that I don't remember hardly anything from those days going over what Martin Luther wrote half a millennia before in his *Small Catechism*. But I do remember the new pastor, who was called to the congregation in the middle of our Confirmation proceedings. I remember him being a little more down to earth, a little more accessible, a little more...seemingly human than the ones before. Unfortunately, that didn't necessarily mean I paid hardly any attention whatsoever to his sermons, including the ones I was supposed to take notes over for that class.

In fact, it wasn't until a couple years later when it started to hit a spiritual home in me in a way I never expected. It was the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost in 2001. That also happened to be the Sunday after two towering behemoths of American might were torn asunder. I remember going into the sanctuary expecting some answers to the dreaded question of "Why?" And even though this particular pastor was a little more down to earth, a little more accessible, a little more seemingly human; there still was that part of me that looked at him as close enough to the wisest one who walked the entire face of the earth. So, surely he would have the answer with enough direct line of access to the Almighty God. And then, something emerged from the high and mighty pulpit that I thought could never be spoken whatsoever. That pastor said the words, "I don't know." And, for some reason, I wasn't shocked. I wasn't disappointed. I didn't feel cheated. I didn't feel betrayed by who was supposed to be the wisest one of all. For some reason, not only did the pastor become a little more down to earth and accessible, but so did the church. So did God. The church became all the more beautiful, all the more hospitable, all the more open to the most complicated questions we mere mortals had that kept us up at night. God became less intimidating, less high and mighty, and more loving and compassionate and well...real in our earthly realm of it all.

And so I wonder about that first reading we heard this morning, where wisdom built a house. I highly doubt that the movers and shapers of those Proverbs from Biblical times long ago ever

envisioned that house being a physical building of organized religion thousands of years later, but I still hope it can be, nonetheless. Granted, for the longest time, I was convinced that that wisdom-filled house of God known as the church, run by the wisest person who walked the entire face of the earth in the pastor, was the place with all the answers stored up in all the information from every Bible and church authority text and Martin Luther *Small Catechism* and whatever important else ever written. But on that not-so-random Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost in 2001, the church miraculously transformed from the place and people with all the answers into a most breath-taking safe-haven for the people with all the questions.

That the church, a most enthralling house of wisdom, would be the place where you could bring in all the doubts and disbeliefs and rejections and giving up moments into a true sanctuary for it all. That you could bring all of it, and still be ushered forward to the encapsulation of wisdom at a Communion table that isn't meant to be so high and mighty distantly separated from us mere mortals unless we do a holy this or a holy that to earn it. But that the wisdom of God would insist on pushing that heavenly yet earthly table directly into the depths of our life, into the thick of our human condition, and say, "Take and eat: this is my love poured out for you. This is my grace that will never be taken away from you," no matter the questions you ask, no matter how much you struggle with Scripture, no matter how much you do not understand what Martin Luther wrote 500 years ago. No matter what, this is your table, this is the wisdom of how God insists the world should be run: with a never-ending supply of hope...for you, for the whole world that God still so loves. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!