

The Beginning of Wisdom

Eph 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

Ps 111

Lesson: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 (Courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

2:10 Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David.

2:11 The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.

2:12 So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

3:3 Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.

3:4 The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

3:5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you."

3:6 And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today.

3:7 And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.

3:8 And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted.

3:9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

3:10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

3:11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right,

3:12 I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

3:13 I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you.

3:14 If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

Again we share in the beginning of a King's reign and the conversation between God and that ruler, just as we did earlier this summer when we looked at the choice of King David, but this seems to be a different variety of King. As each individual offers different gifts, Solomon begins his rule on a very different stratum of discernment.

As we recall, David came practically bounding on the scene ready for bear - and lion - and Goliath and any other kind of physical challenge there could be! In this bit of scripture that we have today as our lesson, Solomon seems to come into his rule as a shy boy, feeling unsure and awestruck by his father and Yahweh. He was Bathsheba's second child with David, the first having died in infancy. Many of his older half brothers had died before the transition of power - Amnon, the eldest died by the plotting of Absalom for the raping of Tamar, and Absalom died in the war he caused in order to take over David's Kingdom. Adonijah was next in line by age, but backstage political finagling made it so that Solomon was pronounced the successor by David.

When Solomon became King, David gave him a list of who to kill and why and what to do next . . . and Solomon pretty much followed his suggestions, but added brother Adonijah to it, for good measure. So now that he has cleared the field and secured his power, he can now focus on his goals as King.

At approximately 20 years old, he inherits the job as the most powerful ruler in the area. The job that many others seemed to want and felt they could only do so through military might, Solomon realizes that he'll need a lot more than force. So when God gets into conversation with him as the new covenant is passed from David to son, Solomon shows signs pretty early of being a different kind of leader. He shows himself to already be a person who loves knowledge and wisdom simply by realizing he needed an understanding mind, and the power of discernment!

We all probably know the famous quote, "The beginning of wisdom is; knowing what you don't know." I always thought it was Socrates who said that, he said many similar things, but one source has it as Confucius, and another Aristotle. The point is - a lot of wise people seem to know that being aware of yourself and your limits is a rare gift of true wisdom.

How often do we feel as though we need to have an answer for everything and we automatically seem to gather what bits of information we know on a topic, add a dash of speculation, and *vóila* we can talk on any topic! Only to find out that we really don't know what we are talking about, from someone who does. And that would be a good thing! Because if we are corrected when we are not as knowledgeable as we think, we have the opportunity to learn. The danger comes when our misperceptions begin to grow as facts and spread like a virus. Soon the truth is even harder to find under all the guesses disguised as wisdom out there.

The lesson of Solomon is that we take a little more time in self reflection, not simply jumping to the first assumption that what pops into our heads and "seems good at the time"; or what we hear from others which fits my emotional needs of the moment. That is not wisdom, regardless of how loud we scream it.

Wisdom and Truth are far more of a challenge to human awareness as we would like it to be, in this society of instantaneous gratification. And all of us would be blessed to be reminded of it regularly. But truth can seem so biased depending on whose perspective is being shared. Paul warns us in the Epistle to be careful how we live, to be wise but to strive to understand the will of God.

Paul said we should strive to be filled with the spirit. But it can be difficult at times to hear the spirit and know if it is of the Lord. I offer a quote by the Dalai Lama:

The basic fact is that all sentient beings, particularly human beings, want happiness and do not want pain and suffering. On those grounds, we have every right to be happy and to use different methods or means to overcome suffering and to achieve happier lives. It is worthwhile to think seriously about the positive and negative consequences of these methods. You should be aware that there are differences between short-term interest and long-term interest and consequences - and the long-term interest is more important. Buddhists usually say that there is no absolute and that everything is relative. So we must judge according to the circumstances.

So, extrapolating from that, we can also see that the beginning of wisdom is when we can begin to see beyond what will make us happy in the moment, and begin to strive for those things which can make us all happy in the long run.

Eternal life, righteousness enduring forever, works and precepts established forever and ever, praise endures forever, "but the one who eats this bread will live forever"; these are a variety of quotes from today's scriptures, including the Psalm. It seems that God hopes for his children a life clear in the understanding that we are not in this world just temporarily and for our own foolishness. No, Christ is in us and when we call ourselves Christians, when we eat the bread and drink the wine (which we Disciples do a lot!) we have Christ in us. We share a covenant with the eternal God - just as Yahweh did with all the previous Judges and Kings of the Israelites, just as God did with Solomon, just as Jesus is one with God and we share in that relationship through the Eucharist, we are called into God's eternal truth.

Now, if we thought discerning the truth on everyday matters was rough . . . here we can really be awestruck and perhaps understand a little more about what Solomon was feeling. In a way, we are all called to be Solomon. We are called to strive for that rare gift of true wisdom; being aware of what we know and what we don't really know, thinking carefully before opening our mouths, discerning what is good and right for the most of God's children in the long run and not just for the few in this moment of history. We are called to think of what is right for eternity and then act accordingly.

It sounds daunting and impossible, but what we may not ever let ourselves forget is that we have Christ in us, we have the Holy Spirit guiding us, we have the power of Yahweh pledged to us . . . and the power of discernment? Well, I think we get a hint at that when we revisit the Psalm we read together at the beginning of the service, "Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. . . . The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom . . ."

The utter amazed awestruck respect of our God is the beginning of wisdom. For when we strive to understand God, we surely are humbled and aware of how little we know and how dependent we are on each other to live out God's will - on earth as it is in heaven. When we think about God's will to be done, we can surely not think only for ourselves and our temporary earthly advances. We are called time and time again to think of life in eternity, to think of Christ in us, a part of us, and of our responsibility to discern what is just and fair as Solomon requested.

Thanks be to Christ who said, "Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me." Let us live as Christ lived, in community and giving thanks to God at all times. Amen