

August 15, 2021
Rev. Kerry Smith

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 (Un)likely Leadership - Solomon
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

New Revised Standard Version

Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. 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. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." 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. 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. 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. 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?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 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, 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. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

In the movie *Big*, the young boy Josh finds a wish-granting machine called Zoltar. He makes a wish to be big and the next morning he is an adult. I wonder how many different wishes that wish-granting machine heard. People wishing for fame, money, love. What would you wish for? In our scripture Solomon gets to make a wish. He wishes for wisdom, to have an understanding mind to govern the people and the ability to discern good from evil. Solomon doesn't ask for power or more money. He wants the wisdom to make decisions for the good of God's people. We are told that Solomon's request pleases God. It is a wish not for comfort but to bring fulfillment.

If you could ask God for anything, what would it be? The Christian faith tells us that we please God when we seek the ways of God. When we seek to live a life worthy of God. When we seek justice, when we love mercy, when we go with humility, when we offer hospitality to God's beloved at the margins, and when we care for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. Solomon teaches us that when we seek a discerning mind above all else, God is pleased with us.

How do you understand wisdom? To me, it is the ability to know right from wrong, to choose right, and to do right. Knowing, Choosing, Doing.¹ A new school year just started or is starting this week. We pray for all of our students, teachers, and administrators to have wisdom and courage to do the next right thing. To discern what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. It is a daily, sometimes moment to moment question. It reminds me of the serenity prayer: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

In his lifetime Solomon doesn't ask for God's wisdom again. I don't mean that there was a time limit applied to God's wisdom, but I definitely don't feel like asking for anything from God, whether it is grace, forgiveness, love, or wisdom, as a one and done thing. I need to be reminded, sometimes every day, that God is with me. But Solomon only asks once.

¹ Julian DeShazier in "Christian Century" email resource. <https://mailchi.mp/christiancentury/sc-free-350975a-352447?e=d6e1e42378>

Just like David, Solomon was not someone to be put on a pedestal for his faith and love for God. Solomon was human. He wanted power, he wanted fame and fortune, and he sought out revenge on his enemies. Solomon's reign was considered disastrous with his policies of taxation and forced labor. There was so much conflict during his reign that it led to the development of the northern and southern kingdoms. The Bible doesn't tell us, be like this person or be like this person because they were so holy. The Bible shows us human people. We recognize ourselves in them, and then we are challenged to do something about it.²

Solomon is like us. We are holy **and** we are horrible.³ We want to be like Solomon as he is described in this passage, as super holy. We want God to be like God is in this passage, too. Solomon asks for wisdom and God is so tickled that God gives him money too. That isn't how God works. We don't believe in a prosperity gospel God. The prosperity gospel is a belief that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for us, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to your church will increase your material wealth. One of the first prosperity gospel preachers, a Baptist preacher in 1915, told his poor congregation, "I say you ought to be rich; you have no right to be poor." Instead of blaming structural inequality, the preacher blamed their poverty on their failure as human beings.

The prosperity gospel sees faith as a contract between us and God. If we have faith in God, God will deliver us security and prosperity. Yes, I believe that God wants good things for me, but I don't believe that God wants me to be rich. The prosperity gospel says that if we're poor, it is because we don't have enough faith. However, if we give more money to the church, then maybe we'll be blessed by God with more money. Prosperity gospel sees God as a banker, giving money to the deserving. Kenneth Copeland who lives in Fort Worth but is on TV wrote in one of his books, "Do you want a hundredfold return on your money? Give and let God multiply it back to you. No bank in the world offers this kind of return!"⁴ Sadly, to him, giving to your church isn't about generosity, but it is a wager on God as a shrewd investment. We here at Greenland Hills **know** that God doesn't reward those eager for wisdom with wealth.

We could wrestle with this text for days, months, maybe even years and not ask all the theological questions about God's wisdom and God's role in this story. Today, maybe it is enough for us to be reminded to seek God's wisdom. It's so easy for us to be on autopilot in our lives. We come to church each Sunday, we say our prayers in the morning and in the evening, but we get stressed to the max when we have a big work or school project. We want to curl into a ball when we think about how to get one child here and another there at the exact same time. We listen to those voices in our head that direct our actions, that direct our self-image, that direct our understanding of the world. We listen to those voices, instead of listening for God's voice.

Maybe it is enough to remember that God is with us, and that God's wisdom is with us as we make decisions. There isn't a time limit on God's wisdom. We don't possess God's wisdom for ourselves, but God is present, God is with us, and we make our decisions in the presence of God in all we do. We remember that God loves us and desires the best for us, not what is the easiest, not what is the most convenient, but what is the **best** for us. God encourages us to make decisions remembering that God is there in that moment. We make decisions every day, for ourselves, for our families, for our workplaces, for our community. May we remember that we are in the presence of God, the wise one, and may that presence impact the decisions we make.

² <https://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/avoiding-the-truth-john-c-holbert-08-10-2015?p=2>

³ https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10909/weekly-preaching-august-15-2021?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=socialnetwork

⁴ Copeland, Kenneth. *Laws of Prosperity*.

I want to share a story about a guru who asked his disciples how they could tell when the night had ended and the day begun. One person said, “When you see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it is a cow or a horse.” “No,” said the guru. Another person said, “When you look at a tree in the distance and can tell if it is a lilac tree or a mango tree.” “Wrong again,” said the guru. “Well then, what is it?” asked his disciples. The guru said, “When you look into the face of any man and recognize your brother in him; when you look into the face of any woman and recognize in her your sister. If you cannot do this, no matter what time it is by the sun, it is still night.”

I ask today for the Holy Spirit to come to us because we **need** God. Breath of God, fill us wholly and completely. Form and shape us into the people you want us to be. Lead us to do what you want us to do. Empower us and use us, speak to us and through us. Produce your fruit in us. Help us to listen to your voice above all other voices that clamor for our attention. Come, Holy Spirit, we need you. Amen.