

October 30, 2022: THIS DAY'S SERMON – Solomon's Wisdom/The Five Solas of Reformation

Readings: 1 King 3:4-28; Matthew 6:9-10

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Let us pray: *God of Promises made and kept, empty us of our "selves", and fill us with your wisdom. Grant us the ability to see the world from your point of view, to judge correctly, and to allow your Truth to govern our lives, through the spiritual wisdom that is found in the teachings and the life of our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Wherever you are as we gather for worship this morning, I invite you to settle yourself, as if on bended knee; not physically, but prayerfully. We come alongside the young King Solomon to the place of sacrifice and burnt offerings.

This morning, we meet Solomon at Gibeon: the highest of places, the pinnacle of God's presence. It is, at the same time, the place that brings Solomon low in the emptying of himself.

In granting Solomon's request for wisdom, God shows God's true greatness. Ironically, Solomon answers God not from the powerful position of the new king, but from the humble position of a child's mind set; in a dream, no less. Dreams ... the place where we can finally be quiet enough to hear God speak.

We learn much from Solomon this morning, newly to the throne of King David, who answers God with the mind of "a small child". Because it's estimated that Solomon was some 20 years old when he took the throne, to answer God as one who speaks from the perspective of a small child would come from a place of humility, rather than physical maturity.

Do you remember what it felt like to be 20-something? Isn't that the age of knowing everything? I can only speak for myself, of course, but it seems to me that aging is about either unlearning what we thought we knew, or beginning to understand that we don't know what we don't know.

In wrestling with this text, I wonder how it is that Solomon came to his understanding of how little he knew? Might it have been that he came to the throne as the son conceived in David's comforting of Bathsheba, following the death of their firstborn son as a punishment from God? Yes, punishment – but punishment wrapped in promise.

Whatever it was, in the life of Solomon, we see both the faithfulness of God in the midst of the unfaithfulness of humanity and the power of God to bring life from death.

This is the God of promise, radiant enough to shine the light of hope in the darkest of places. Powerful enough to build faith from our failure to be faithful. Loving enough to sacrifice his own life so that we might be given life. In this story, we are reminded that there are no pieces of life so

broken and crushed — by our selves and the world — that they cannot be used by the God to fashion a mosaic of hope.

Through Solomon, we learn to come to God as empty vessels, waiting to be filled. This begins with the emptying of ourselves of the "selves" we hold dear: Understanding, aggrandizement, power ... wealth.

And filled, he is. King Solomon descends from Gibeon, filled with the blessings of God. He returns to Jerusalem, to the arc of the covenant, to burnt offerings and offerings of well being. What does he do next? He provides a feast to his servants. Not his family. Not his peers or his cronies. His servants.

Solomon begins his reign by using the gift he had asked for: the gift of Wisdom. In our modern world, to possess wisdom is commonly thought of as the quality of having experience, knowledge and good judgment.

In the Hebrew language, the word translated as "wisdom" is *chokmah*. Chokmah is the ability to judge correctly and follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. It's the ability to see something from God's viewpoint. Wisdom is "God's character reflected in the many practical affairs of life."

The first example we see of this gift of wisdom comes, no less, as Solomon sits as judge in the case of a dispute between two mothers over a newborn child. Neither mother is given a name. They are known only as one woman versus another. They enter the story as women without position or power. They are both alone in the world. Their predicament is that of turning to a life of prostitution in order to survive.

In receiving these lowliest of women into his court, Solomon engages the "wisdom" of seeing the world through God's viewpoint. Regardless of their position, these women as seen as worthy of the King's time. In settling the dispute, God's viewpoint is demonstrated through the love of a parent for a child. A parent who so loves a child that she would give that child up to another in order for it to have life.

The story closes without us ever knowing which woman – the one or the other – is which. We're left only knowing that the one who was given the child was the one who was willing to give it away so that it might be spared.

This is a story we know well. We see it in God's own humble entrance into humanity in the birth of Jesus. We see it in the life of Jesus, who welcomes the sinners, sits with the lowly, comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

We see it in the humility of the One who bears the cross when he could smash it; who forgives his condemners when he could strike them down; who conquers death for all time and all people by rising from the ashes of a broken humanity in order to breathe new life into the world.

This morning we find hope in the gift of God's wisdom to Solomon in our own quest for God's wisdom in our lives. Dick said it well in his reflection for today: "The heart of our God is focused on love and justice. His expectation is that his children will care more about each other than they will about themselves."

In his book, *The Alphabet of Grace*, author, preacher and theologian Frederick Buechner writes, "If we want to live, we first have to die; to be rich, we must spend ourselves down to the last nickel; to be happy, we must be willing to let our hearts break; to be blessed, we must be willing to give, not get, to lose rather than win, and to reach out into the night for a hand that's not there."

We live in a world deeply in need of re-forming. As Lutherans, the gift of ongoing "re-formation" is inherent in our tradition. To be resilient enough to be reshaped while holding fast to our faith foundation is key as we lean into the challenges of today's world. The question is, how do we begin?

Perhaps we begin by taking the posture of Solomon, with the mind of a child; with the emptying of our "selves" in order to hear God speaking ... to feel God reaching. On this day, we remember the teachings of our Reformer: The Five Solas that remind us that, in God, we have everything we need for this life and the next:

Scripture Alone, teaching us that the Holy Scriptures alone fully contain the will of God and that, in the end, all other authorities in the Christian life serve underneath scripture.

Christ Alone, reminding us that God stooped so low as to speak a saving word to us in the midst of our day-to-day sin.

Faith Alone, which affirms that we find abundant life not in trusting in ourselves, but in Jesus the Christ and his perfect obedience.

Grace Alone, which is not limited to our justification, but spans all of salvation from start to finish. It originates not with us at all, but stems from God's mercy in eternity, and depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. In short, God's choice is not conditioned on us, which would give us reason to boast, but on his electing grace, which is unconditional.

And, finally...

God Alone; for it is only if our salvation is by grace alone that God alone receives all the glory. If there is something of our own we can claim, then we no longer boast in Christ alone. But if he is the author and finisher of our salvation, then he alone is to be magnified for his sovereign grace.

It is these Five Solas – **Scripture Alone, Christ Alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone, God Alone** – that cultivate an attitude like that of Solomon; an attitude of total humility. Whether it is in our everyday lives or our praise this morning, to God alone be the glory.

Amen.