

Jon Hauerwas – The Gift of Discernment – August 19, 2018  
Psalm 111:1-10 and 1 Kings 2:10-12 and 3:3-14

After months of preparation and hard work, our sanctuary remodel is nearing completion. The carpet and planking have been installed, and our worship space has that new car smell about it. The result is both beautiful and functional. Understandably, our church leaders want to protect our investment. So as fall approaches, you will notice signage reminding both members and guests that, with the exception of baby milk or formula, no food or drink should enter the sanctuary. The reasoning is for this is simple. Because even on our best days, we are still capable of spilling coffee on the carpet.

Now, granted, this example is minor in the grand scheme of things. But, it still sheds light on the many ways that our actions can hurt or disrupt the greater community. And if we are willing to admit it, each of us is guilty of countless total fails. In this, we are just like our ancestors, as Scripture attests to nearly every unsavory deed that you can imagine.

Recently, we learned about King David, whose desires led him, in quick succession, to break three of the 10 Commandments. And while he faced a number of consequences for his actions, God was still able to work with and through him. In the New Testament, his royal inheritance is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

Yes. There are many misguided people in the Bible. People who, for some reason, God just won't give up on. There were Joseph's brothers who threw him in a pit and who were ultimately redeemed in Egypt. And there was Paul, who in his zeal for the Jewish faith, originally killed Christians before he became one himself.

And there were disciples, like Judas, who even in their betrayal, still managed to fulfill the purposes of God. Because, as we've heard before, God's weakness is wiser than human strength. And at the cross, God chose what is weak to upend all conventional understandings of wisdom.

Returning now to David, and God's promises to him, we find him on his deathbed. A successor is needed and Solomon, one of his children with Bathsheba, becomes the heir apparent. He receives David's blessing. A coronation ensues. Solomon is king.

When a new king is installed in, say, Great Britain, what is typically said and sung in those places? "Long live the king." Why is this important? It's a sign of respect. But, also, practically, why is it important for a king to have a long life? Stability. The people understand that if the king rules well and for a long time, then it will benefit all of the people.

In our second lesson today, we hear that Solomon has an encounter with God. In it, he does not ask “for the trappings of glory and worldly success that made up much of the royal ideology: long life, riches, and death to the opposition.”<sup>1</sup> Instead, Solomon adhered to “the pattern of the king as God’s servant, a loyal vassal in a covenant relationship. The goal in this sort of kingship is the welfare of God’s people, not the glory of the king.”<sup>2</sup>

He asks God for four things.

- 1) An understanding mind. (literally a “hearing heart”)
- 2) To discern between good and evil.
- 3) To discern what is good and right (literally “to hear judgment”)
- 4) A wise and discerning mind (literally “heart”)<sup>3</sup>

We know that the heart is the organ that pumps blood throughout our body. It is not responsible for the processing of information. But, poetry, literature, art, and song often lead us to believe that it does. In the Old Testament, “the heart is the

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James Luther Mays (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). Pg. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 31.

organ of thought and will.” Speaking of the heart was akin to longing for an instinct for the truth.<sup>4</sup>

Wisdom may be personal, but it is not private. Wisdom is taking care of our bodies, our minds, our place of worship, our communities, our earth. Wisdom is presenting ourselves before the font of baptism, as we witnessed during the early service this morning, not because we believe that an infant has done anything wrong, but because we are well aware of the human condition.

We baptize as a sign of what God is doing in us, cleansing, redeeming, and freeing us in order that we might be reconciled. And so we turn to God, asking that the Spirit will guide us in all wisdom and truth. May it be so and thanks be to God. Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 32.