



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

The Very Rev. Holladay Sanderson

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 Ephesians 5:15-10 John 6: 51-58 Psalm 111

Bread and Wisdom

Ah, this morning we heard the beloved story of Solomon and his request for God to grant him the wisdom

to discern good from evil and
to discern the best way to govern.

Paul, in the letter to the Ephesians,
re-emphasizes our OWN need to live as wise people...
ones who know the way to live out God's will.

Indeed, God was impressed with Solomon's request for wisdom instead of great wealth.

So, God was delighted to grant Solomon
both a discerning and wise heart and will.

Naturally, Solomon was, like us a frail human,
and not a perfect one.

As we read more deeply into 1 Kings,
we discover how Solomon enslaved Israelites
in order to build the temple...
that house for God that
God said David did not need to build.

We would read of the way Solomon
pressed the marginalized in the kingdom
to help create the riches and power that
Solomon came to enjoy.

Walter Brueggemann, in his powerful book *The Prophetic Imagination*,
writes of how Israel, over the centuries from Moses,

steadily misused power...

This steady growth of Power Over the People
(instead of With them)

culminated in the critiques from the prophets and
Israel's eventual exile from the Land.

Still Solomon did begin on the right foot.

The story most of us know...

about his decision involving the two mothers...

who claim the same baby

is the hallmark of his wisdom:

his ability to offer the solution that
reveals the true mother.

Cut the baby in half and give $\frac{1}{2}$ to each.

So the true mother begs the king

to give the baby to the other mother instead.

SHE is the one who wants the baby to live;

she is revealed as the true mother and
Solomon returns her child.

As I said, Solomon DID begin on the right foot.

However, over the years, he proved all too human and
strayed from the godly path

he had sought in the early years of his kingship.

Such a journey of a biblical hero

can be a comfort to each of us.

If God could use Solomon with his weaknesses...

much like he used other biblical notables

[like Jacob the deceiver or Moses the stutterer],

then surely God can use us as well.

Throughout all our stories,

we have heard story after story

of fellow fallible humans whom God used

to further the increase of God's reign.

As Paul and other teachers in the early church have taught,
all of us fall short...

and still God loves us, nourishes us, and
uses us in the world.

How do we go about attaining or learning
 the wisdom Paul calls us to use;
 the wisdom we need to live
 that which we have prayed for this morning?

As children of the living God in this community,
 we prayed that we would "receive thankfully
 the fruits of his redeeming work, and
 to follow daily in the blessed steps
 of his most holy life."

In short, we prayed for what Paul taught:
 that we would be able
 to "understand what the will of the Lord is" ...
 for each of us, both individually and as a community.
 So, how DO we go about acquiring
 God's gift of that wisdom?
 How might we receive it?

Certainly, we have the stories we learn in the scriptures -
 daily, monthly, annually.
 These stories nourish and steep us
 in the lore of God's work in the world...
 before, during and after
 the time of Jesus walking in our midst.
 Through this abundance of the knowledge
 of the Lord amidst the people,
 we are able to perceive
 what kind of people we are called to become
 (or NOT to become!!);
 and we are able to perceive how it might look
 to live a life as wise
 (OR unwise) people of God!
 The stories of the Bible and
 the stories of our history as Christians
 nourish us continually.

The most important nourishment we can receive

is that which comes from our knowledge of the life of Jesus:
 his life, his ministry, his Passion and his resurrection...
 and their promise for us all.

Through it all, Jesus taught us that
 the most important commandments for us -
 the most wisdom-filled commandments -
 were to live lives of love...
 for God and for each other.
 Those commandments are the covenant
 of which today's psalm speaks.

Love. That is all.
 Love is the essence of the God whom we worship and
 that love had such an all-encompassing power
 to attract people into Jesus's presence.
 People came to him and listened to him and
 wished to be touched by him
 because of the power of the love of God that
 simply exuded from his very presence in their lives.

He engaged the people... just as he engages us today...
 with the power of living out God's love.
 To love one another and God and ourselves,
 we have to open ourselves to that which is beyond us.
 What is beyond us could be the God
 of whom we are in awe;
 the awe-filling God on whose steadfast love we rely;
 in the psalmist's words,
 the God whom we "fear."
 The psalmist said,
 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
 That is, we know that
 the wholly Other whom we dare to love
 actually... and amazingly...
 touches our lives and
 loves us back.

To be open to what is beyond us
 could also simply be opening ourselves
 to the needs of those around us and
 acting to help fill those needs that we can address.

To be open to what is beyond us
 could finally be opening ourselves
 to the promise of Jesus' nourishment of us eternally
 with his body and his blood.

In the gospel this morning,
 Jesus speaks once again with his "I AM" statement that
 he is the bread from heaven.
 He continues with the eucharistic terms of
 our being called to eat his flesh and drink his blood.
 He tells us that the nourishment that comes from him
 will enable us to live forever.

Those in the early church who would disparage Christians
 used this and similar passages
 to paint Christians as cannibals and,
 later in history,
 as those who would sacrifice children for their food.
 These shallow minds could never dig deeply enough
 to understand that Jesus's words
 were our invitation to share most intimately
 in what he had to teach us about life in God's love.

They could not see that
 the solid foundation of the eternal bread of God's deep love for us
 was all the nourishment we need in order to live as wise people.

They could not see that
 the nourishment of Jesus in our lives
 fills us with the love we need
 in order to live godly lives:
 lives steeped in the wisdom founded in God's love.

They could not see that
 the nourishment of the bread of life,

Jesus' very self,
is just what we need
to sustain us in God's love and wisdom forever.
We DO see. AMEN