

What's On Your Mind

Sunday, August 16, 2015; Kings 2:1-3, 3:3-14; Mark 4:10-12

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David, just before he died, anointed and blessed his son Solomon to be King of Israel. He advises Solomon to “be strong and show yourself a man.”

David also instructs Solomon “to walk in the way of the Lord your God and keep his statutes, commandments, ordinances and testimonies”.

After Solomon takes the throne, God appears to Solomon in a dream by night asking “What shall I give you?”

Solomon responds, “I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people?”

And God answers, “Behold I do according to your word. Behold I give you a wise and discerning mind. And I give you what you have not asked for, both riches and honor.”

However, God inserted a qualifying statement: “And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”

You know the rest of the story. Solomon was devoted to God. He stood before the Ark of the Covenant and built the House of the Lord over a span of thirteen years. He ruled with wisdom and understanding amassing riches and power, excelling all the kings of the earth. At the dedication of the House of the Lord, he offered a prayer and blessing pages long in tribute to God.

However the Lord became angry with Solomon. King Solomon loved many foreign women. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines. When he was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

The Lord said to Solomon, “That since you did not keep my covenant and my statutes which I commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you.”

It is clear from today's scriptural truth that an understanding mind will only be effective in the long run if it adheres to God's covenant.

We learn some important lessons from today's interaction between Solomon and God. The divinely inspired truths from the Bible can inspire us to function more effectively in our daily interactions in the world today

First, an understanding mind is of highest value for leadership.

All of us at one time or another has questioned our ability to function adequately in that role, whether as a spouse, apparent, a friend, a neighbor or an employee. Whatever is on your mind can be uploaded to God for illumination. It is a regular practice of mine to offer to God and Christ my concerns so as to receive guidance.

Friday evening I was bar-b-q-ing on the grille in my yard when a neighbor unexpectedly approached me and began to converse. This surprised me because Charlie, a man my age, is a person of few words, lives alone, is self-sufficient and keeps to himself. He is a likeable guy and devotes a lot of time as a volunteer for the Audubon Society. He looked weary and was wearing a black case hanging from his neck. He spoke rapidly. He had had a heart attack two weeks ago while driving. He had blacked out and totaled his car. He also suffered a stroke and was hospitalized for a week. He suffered no injuries. He is wearing a portable defibrillator and is being monitored for his heart condition. His insurance has not come through so he is without his car and will buy an inexpensive replacement. He is putting his place up for sale and will downsize into an apartment on one floor. He no longer wants to manage the stairs and upkeep. I offered help in a variety of ways, as well as an open line, but he maintained he is able to function fine.

Understanding goes a long way. It is an entry into helpfulness. God provides understanding and want us to give it.

2. God provides us with a discerning mind. Discernment is essential for leadership. Understanding without discernment is like strawberry shortcake without the shortcake. God will provide us with a rich and fulfilling life if we live according to his commandments. The Ten Commandments are the backbone of Western civilization. We know what they are. The difficulty is that God also imbued us with free will so that we can follow them or not.

Discernment is the ability to know the difference between good and evil, between what is harmful and what is helpful, between what is wanted and what is needed, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is moral and what is immoral, between what is ethical and what is unethical. We need to live in harmony with God's will for us.

We are in covenant with God. God is our guideline for truth. No one person is above another. "Thou shall have no other Gods before me". And the beauty of the church is that discernment can be reached through a collective process of sacred dialogue.

Finally, there is hope. An understanding and discerning mind is only effective if it adheres to God's covenant with us. Though we err and fail to live according to God's will, there is always the possibility of correction. In both the Judaic and Christian traditions, God's steadfast love and forgiveness reaches out to us.

For us Christians, Jesus is the source of salvation, of renewal, of redemption. The New Testament lesson this morning is one of the most widely discussed scriptures for understanding. "And he said to them (the disciples), to you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but to those outside, everything is in parables".

To me, the secret is God's love through the life of Christ. Christ is a different type of King, unlike Solomon. Christ never constructed a building and refused to have a monument built in his name. He instead brought the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. He never was the minister of a church but had a ministry to the people. He never had an army of warriors or fought a war but was a Prince of Peace. He never transgressed the sacred commandments of God but gave his own life that we might live.