

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, August 16, 2009

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

“Wisdom” versus “discernment”

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

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

Psalm 111

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

Last week, I harangued the readers with the difference between “ignorant” and “stupid”. Some did not get the shading of the difference. Some chose to stay in the umbra of ignorance or the total eclipse of stupidity. Yes, life is a choice of very (sometimes) clear alternatives as we will see in the passages we discuss this week. If you ask a hundred people “What did Solomon ask God to give him”, most will say “wisdom”. No, no, no. This is a very important point that we often miss. Read the passages again and the request will become clearer. Why do we study these passages if not to learn something that will enhance OUR lives? An old adage is: “Be careful what you ask for, you just might get it.” (Last week we studied “ignorant” versus “stupid” to lay the ground work for this discussion.) Wisdom is the result of a lot of ignorant mistakes or a pure gift of grace from God. It is much easier to ask for wisdom than it is to learn it the “hard way”. Most of us come to “wisdom” from life experiences or the ratio of “failures” versus “successes”. IF a long string of “failures” leads to wisdom, “wisdom” is just around the corner for most of us. Will we recognize it when it arrives? Will we appreciate it in ourselves and others? Who do you know who is “wise”? How did they get that way? Have you asked? A good “start” is to look at these passages and explore the back story of the events, people and outcomes. Wisdom comes when we LEARN DISCERNMENT and that “doing it God’s way” is wiser than “doing it my way”.

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

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."

I've noticed my increasing awareness of obituaries as I have aged. The first paragraph of this passage is "David's Obituary". The entire life story of the most famous King of Israel is summarized in 50 words or less. (They must have had an "editor" like the ones for whom I work.) How long would yours be? Was David the "acme" of the Kings of Israel or was Solomon? It depends on whom you ask, doesn't it? Who is the most "famous" person in your church, occupation or family? How did they get this "fame"? FAME or INFAMY are "opinions" of others and are mainly dependent on PR and few "facts". Fame, like all legends, grows with each sequential telling. The chroniclers of David and Solomon wrote down a lot that we have to assume was true. If we only read the parts that can be substantiated by history, 1 and 2 Kings would be a very short read. IF our life stories contained only "substantiated" TRUE items, how long would ours be? I am amazed at what is written down as "truth" and swallowed by people. Some balk at the idea of the existence of "God" but swallow anything they read, see or hear in the "news". Is this a true account of the events that began the reign of Solomon? How do we know it is the truth? Okay, it's in the "Bible". Is that your entire answer? What's the difference between "ignorance" and "stupidity"? Does your brain only serve to keep your ears apart or is it used for thinking? The God who gave you a heart also gave you a brain...both of which need to be used. Who is the "speaker" in this passage? Is this what SOLOMON told the chronicler or did Solomon write it down personally? Beware of those who say "God told me in a dream such and such." Why is it nearly always supportive of the reporter and seldom constructive for the person being told? Notice that ALL the "facts" of this encounter add to the "fame" of Solomon. According to this

one-sided account, Solomon DID NOT ASK GOD FOR WISDOM. Solomon asked for “an understanding MIND to govern your people, able to DISCERN between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?” So, did Solomon not make any mistakes during his entire reign? We all remember the story of the two women who wanted Solomon to decide which one got the surviving baby after one of them suffocated her own. The Jewish literature is full of arcane and lengthy discussion about this one story. You can “Google” it for yourself and spend your time deciphering the “truth” of the passage on your time. Also note that “because” Solomon’s request “pleased God”, he was given a wise and discerning mind, fame, fortune and honor, according to the teller of this encounter in a “day dream”. Also note that there is an attempt to “clean up” the life story of King David as a postlude to this story. When was this written? Was it written shortly before it happened, when it happened or long after it happened? What is your gut feeling? Is a real “prophecy” or a re-hash of past events by the author of Kings? Is it the “true account” or is it “revisionist history”? You will recall that the books, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles are actually ONE LITERARY work which is conveniently divided by the 72 “scholars” who translated the Hebrew into Greek as the “Septuagint”. The easy answer: We neither know the author nor the source of the materials contained in “The Book of Kings”. Now, you were saying...Solomon asked God for WISDOM? Discernment, practiced for a long time LEADS to WISDOM. Wisdom implies a long track record of attempts that fail and succeed because of the practice of DISCERNMENT. Discernment trumps wisdom every time it’s tried. I pray for “discernment” so that I may rightly “judge” my life and become “wise”.

Psalm 111

1

Hallelujah!

***I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, *
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.***

2

***Great are the deeds of the LORD! *
they are studied by all who delight in them.***

3

***His work is full of majesty and splendor, *
and his righteousness endures for ever.***

4

***He makes his marvelous works to be remembered; *
the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.***

5

***He gives food to those who fear him; *
he is ever mindful of his covenant.***

6

He has shown his people the power of his works *

3

- 7 *in giving them the lands of the nations.*
- 8 *The works of his hands are faithfulness and justice; *
all his commandments are sure.*
- 9 *They stand fast for ever and ever, *
because they are done in truth and equity.*
- 10 *He sent redemption to his people;
he commanded his covenant for ever; *
holy and awesome is his Name.*
- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; *
those who act accordingly have a good UNDERSTANDING;
his praise endures for ever.**

In the dualism that we have often discussed, what is the “antithesis” of “wisdom”? The antithesis of “wisdom” is “foolishness” (or stupidity). This psalm further elucidates the duality with **“The FEAR of the LORD is the BEGINNING of WISDOM.”** This is reflexive of the logic contained in **“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no GOD’”**. Logically, wisdom STARTS with our discernment of the power and majesty found in the authority God has over each of us. The respect (translated as “fear”) for a palpable, ever-present LORD is DISCERNMENT and the “beginning of wisdom.” Discernment allows for the beginning and propagation of “wisdom.” Can one be “wise” without discernment?

Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone clamors for “choices” in healthcare, food and many other spheres of life. We get to choose our spouses. We get to choose our “God”. We get to choose our “religion”. We get to choose our “church”, even the “brand” of “church” and which “church group” with which to associate. What divides most “churches”? This passage contains several of the “tests” for dividing churches: foolish political stances, wine or no wine, “instrumental music” versus a Capella singing, which “version” of scripture to “believe”, etc. This kind of “pseudo-discernment” (overly judgmental attitude) only leads to a “them versus us” mentality that must grieve the Holy Spirit. IF God used the same kind of “discernment” and “wisdom” to judge us (without grace in the “formula”), most of

us would have no hope of salvation. One of the problems with churches is that we live unwise lives in public and yet, pretend to be different people among our "church family". The world calls us "hypocrites" and they are usually correct in their assessment of our actions. How can we be so "unwise" in our daily lives and pretend to be "wise" at church? What allows us to be "wise" in our daily lives? It is the same thing that allows us to be "wise" in our spiritual lives: DISCERNMENT. Discernment is just another word for "wise choices". A "wise choice" implies that we have studied the facts, debated them INTERNALLY and come to a conclusion that we can LIVE WITH. Having made a "wise choice" allows us to live lives "giving thanks to God the Father AT ALL TIMES (not just Sunday morning) and for everything (yes, everything) in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The reason we are divided as Christians is that many have never done the hard work of SELF-discernment so that we can make "wise choices" for OURSELVES. I do not HAVE TO AGREE with everyone with whom I meet to worship but I have to AGREE that God is OUR FATHER and we are ALL God's CHILDREN. I have to choose to grant THEM the SAME GRACE that God has granted me. I have to choose to accept them "warts and all" through discernment. If only "perfect people" could worship God, ALL of the pews (and pulpits) would be empty. I have to exhibit the LOVE OF GOD by discerning my and their imperfection and choosing to be in fellowship with them hoping to support and encourage the PEOPLE OF GOD by living lives of gratitude to God who has saved us through GRACE. Discerning the existence of God, the Holy Spirit and GRACE is true wisdom that leads to UNITY in Christ and stops a lot of the petty bickering that divides us. God, make us people of "discernment" leading to wisdom. Start the "discernment" with my examining myself and my motives so that I can live a life of "wisdom". Most of us only learn from our mistakes. You don't think you NEED a church until you NEED A CHURCH. That's when discernment pays the dividend of WISDOM.

John 6:51-58

Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

These statements perplexed the Jews because they could discern neither the divinity of Christ nor the gift of GRACE that he brought. Wisdom is the ability to

discern the bull from the bull feces by discernment. This is the “real deal” but the Jews had trouble grasping the truth and simplicity of the message. They did not trust Jesus because they lacked discernment. They could not discern the human being they saw with their eyes from the spiritual Son of Man who offered them salvation. They were unwise because they could not tell the difference between “sand” and “rock”. Some will recall the VBS song “The WISE man built his house upon the ROCK...” Discerning the message of Jesus as “food and drink” that would give ETERNAL fulfillment was beyond them. Is it beyond you and me? Can I discern the “simple message” of Jesus **“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them”**? Why do we make it so complicated when we should be able to discern it for ourselves? We have problems because it is beyond our “human logic”. **“IF you believe in God who you have NOT seen, believe also in ME who you HAVE SEEN.”** (My translation of the quotation) When logic fails us, we have to be able to discern it with our hearts. Faith starts when discernment of the facts ends and we have to swallow our pride and keep on going against what the world calls “logic”. It is not “logical” that God would love me, send his Son to save me and make the only pre-requisite my belief in His Son. Can we discern the “bull” from the “bull crap”? I use those words because they will get your attention better than the polite terms. (If Jesus can say “Look at those white-washed coffins that look good but still smell like crap...” then, I am on solid footing. The early “translators” really worked to “scrub” the gospels of “plain language”.) So, IF we wish to be “as wise as Solomon”, we need to ask for “discernment” that will allow us to become truly WISE.