

“Asking for It”

Salado UMC—19 August 2018: 13th after Pentecost

Preaching Text: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 --Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

+++++

“There are more tears shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers”

—Saint Theresa of Jesus

+++++

A friend tells the story of a UMC daylong meeting:

The pastor who was to give the opening devotional message became ill and could not come. The bishop tapped a newly ordained clergyman at the meeting and asked if he would give the opening devotional message. “I can't do that,” the young man replied. I'm not prepared.”

“Sure, you can,” replied the bishop. “I really want you to do it!”

“But how can I,” came the insistent reply. “What will I say?”

The bishop put his hand on the young man's shoulder and said, “Just trust the Lord, son. Just trust the Lord.”

The younger man took the Bishop's Bible, as he offered to the young man, who then began thumbing through it looking for a suitable text. As he did so, he came upon some notes between the Bible's pages. As he looked at the notes, he realized that they contained some very fine thoughts. So, he quickly assimilated them into a message, walked into the meeting room, and gave an excellent devotional to begin the day.

When he had finished, the Bishop came rushing up to him. Instead of congratulating him, he was quite upset. “Do you realize,” he said, “that you used the notes for my closing devotional today? How could you do that? Now what am I supposed to do?”

And the younger man put his hands on the bishop's shoulder and said, “Just trust the Lord, Bishop. Just trust the Lord” [Thanks to the late Rod Wilmoth, Minneapolis, MN for this story]!

Our text today concerns trust and prayer. The 1 Kings' account of Solomon's prayer represents the most positive account of King Solomon in the Hebrew scriptures. Later in Solomon's reign the biblical writers depict him as politically oppressive as Pharaoh. Solomon forced backbreaking labor on his own people in order to build his empire. Solomon also had many wives and concubines. Solomon entered these relationships for various political, military, and economic reasons. Yet, the biblical writers frowned on foreign wives because these wives brought with them the baggage of foreign divinities. Idolatry was the chief theological issue here. Therefore, Solomon's reign as king of Israel is not untarnished. Our text today helps us see him as Israel remembered him at his best. This 1 Kings text plainly approves Solomon.

Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. [11] The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. [12] So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established (1 Kings 2:10-12).

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. [4] 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.

[5] At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." [6] 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. [7] 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. [8] 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. [9] 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?"

[10] It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. [11] 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, [12] 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. [13] I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. [14] If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life" (1 Kings 3:3-14).

Coca-Cola's success is largely due to its leader's vision. Robert Woodruff, Coke's president from 1923 to 1955, boldly said during World War II: "We will see that everyone in the world will have tasted Coca-Cola." Quite a vision!

Walt Disney passed away before Disney World opened. When they opened the park, the introducer stated: "Mrs. Disney, I just wish Walt could have seen this." She stood up, then simply said, "He did," and sat down. Visions are powerful.

Solomon could have asked Yahweh for anything: wealth, long-life, or unlimited power. Solomon, however, had the wisdom to ask for an "understanding mind to discern between good and evil." Perhaps, in this way, king Solomon obtained the reputation as a model of wisdom. Even today, we commonly hear talk about the wisdom of Solomon. Wisdom and vision were the great things Solomon asked of the LORD. The text even states: "It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this." Maybe, one thing Solomon's prayer suggests is that we need wisdom and discernment more than things and stuff. Wisdom provides for us a necessary long-term perspective on life.

A hero of many was the late Russian dissident, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He writes of an experience he had in prison while working 12 hours a day at hard labor and writing and smuggling his work out of prison at night. He had lost his family and told by doctors in the Gulag that he had terminal cancer. He thought, "there is no reason for me to continue. I'm going to die anyway." Ignoring guards, Solzhenitsyn

dropped his shovel and sat down and rested his head in his hands, waiting for the guards to arrest or kill him.

As Solzhenitsyn sat, he felt a presence next to him. Looking up, he saw an old man he'd never seen before, sitting next to him. The man took a stick and drew a cross in the sand in front of Solzhenitsyn. It reminded him that there is a power in the world greater than any empire or government; a power that could change his situation. He picked up his shovel and went back to work. He was later released from prison, lived for a time in America, and only recently returned to Russia to continue his campaign for human freedom. Solzhenitsyn never saw the old man again, but he had saved his life and brought hope and redemption to his soul. Our heartfelt prayers give us a holy perspective on life.

When we pray, may we follow the example of the young Solomon and ask in our prayers something noble; something that will build the community of faith. May our prayers reflect our Christian desire to better the world in which we live. Before us are selfish and self-centered prayers or prayers that could bind us to others. May we pray like Jesus and pray for others. As the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), once wrote: "Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays." Jesus' prayers often depict a bending of Jesus' will toward God's will. The prayer at the garden of Gethsemane is a good example (Matthew 26:36-46).

Two signs of Jesus abide, even if all else be ignored or forgotten—a prayer and a cross. People who are categorically ignorant about the Bible and the Christian faith can often recite the Lord's Prayer, and know that Jesus was crucified. These are Jesus' memorials; not a tombstone nor a moneyed foundation, but a simple prayer and some gallows set against the horizon. About five hundred million people say the Lord's Prayer regularly. If each earnestly prayed it, the world could be transformed. Napoleon once asked, "Do you wish to see that which is really sublime?" and answered his own question, "Repeat the Lord's Prayer." But apparently that was all Napoleon did; he only repeated it. So, it left no deep imprint on his conduct. Yet, even a person who misuses the Lord's Prayer cannot forget it, and the remembrance is a seed that may yet bear fruit in his barrenness.

When you pray remember Solomon's prayer as a young king. Solomon prayed for wisdom and discernment. If it works in the throne room, maybe it will work in the drawing room, the board room, and the school room. Amen.

David Neil Mosser, Salado UMC, Salado, Texas 76571