

Holy Wisdom

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish
August 18-19, 2018
Pentecost 13
1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

*Grace and peace to you from God,
who continues to appear in our lives.
Whose presence we seek and whose work we discern. Amen.*

Move 1: Mom following the bus

School has officially started. Let the learning and molding of young minds begin again. Summer always goes too fast, and I still remember how difficult it was to get in the school mindset after that long break.

And this week, as I observed kids in our neighborhood being picked up by school buses, I remembered an awesome story about my mother.

My mother is a saint. But she's a little protective when it comes to her children. She's a woman of steadfast love, but you mess with her pups, and you got Momma Fish on your doorstep.

Well, picture how she felt on my first day of kindergarten. I'm the oldest in the family. First one to go through this whole thing. That morning, my mom wakes me up three hours early to make sure she can capture every moment. I put on my first-day outfit. Wearing my Converse All Stars. I got my sweet Ninja Turtles lunch box with my Lunchable. I'm ready to go.

And, I admit, I was a little nervous as I walked out to the bus stop. But I look over, and there's my mom pacing. Back and forth. Back and forth. Biting her nails. Trying to give me a pump-up speech, but almost saying it to herself: "You are going to do great. You got this."

The bus comes. I say my goodbyes. And off we go. I sit in the first seat I can find, which is near the front.

A couple minutes in, I see the bus driver keep looking at his mirrors. He's complaining and muttering something under his breath. Then I hear him get on the radio to the bus barn.

I kid you not, this is what he says: "Yeah, I got a crazy lady following me way too close. She's been following me for the last couple miles. Don't know what to make of it."

I look back, and guess who it is riding in our Town & Country minivan. Yep, you guessed it. My loving mother.

She was later pulled over by the police for following the school bus too closely.

I only poke fun at her because, in three years, I'll do the exact same thing with Ellie.

My mother couldn't let any other car in between her and the bus. She had to be as close as possible and see that I got to school safely.

Sometimes I wonder if we could feel that way about our faith and relationship with God. God always is that parent who gets as close as possible to us. But we have a tendency to like to have cars and space in between God and us.

What would our lives and faith look like if we desired that close relationship with God? Where we want to walk so closely to God that, in doing so, we get called out for being too close?

In today's story we have a shift in leadership. David dies, and the throne now belongs to his son Solomon.

And Solomon right away understands the tremendous responsibility of the title of king. He feels the heavy burden that the title holds. And the first thing Solomon does is pray to God. He prays that he may walk step-by-step with God. He wants an understanding mind and listening heart. An ability to discern between God's will and evil.

He wants a relationship of closeness for him and his people. He wants to be so close that the cops will get called on him, just like my mother.

That's what we hear in Solomon's prayer today. A prayer of closeness. A prayer of right relationship for him, God, and God's people.

Move 2: Scripture

The last month or so, we've been immersed in King David's life. David's reign has now come to an end. After forty years as ruler and king, David has died. But under his leadership, the nation of Israel is strong and the people of Israel are numerous.

Follow in those footsteps. Big shoes to fill. Well, that person and shadow to follow falls on David's son, Solomon.

And right away, Solomon feels the pressure. The young king realizes the enormous responsibility placed upon him. And the first thing he does is seek solitude and worship, and pray to God.

This week's reading is the private exchange between God and Solomon. And in this exchange, a description is given for the origins of Solomon's wisdom, for which he is famous. [1]

God appears to Solomon in a dream. Solomon joins many important biblical characters that feature God appearing and associated with dreams: Jacob and Joseph in Genesis, Daniel and Joseph, Jesus' earthly father. [2]

God approaches Solomon and asks him, "Ask what I should give you."

And one would think Solomon would respond with things like fame, power, riches. But he doesn't. Solomon prays for wisdom and a discerning heart. He's not interested in seeking superficial things.

He's concerned with relationships. [3] He shows incredible humility and vulnerability admitting he needs God's guidance in leading the people of Israel. Solomon wants his people to continue to have a good relationship with God. And he wants to lead in a way that is in line with God's will.

Solomon's humility leads God to grant him wisdom. The two characteristics go hand-in-hand: humility besets wisdom.

Solomon is, of course, a human ruler. While he starts strong here and it's easy to admire him, we will hear later of his falters and failures. It's another reminder that the king we worship is not of this world. God works in and through flawed human beings. But no one can match the loving rule and reign of God. [4]

Nonetheless, this story sheds light on the fact that leadership and faithful living involve a delicate balance between humility and confidence.[5] Confidence not in our own ability, but confidence in what God can do in and through our skills, gifts, and talents.

Solomon's greatness and wisdom come from his insight that everything starts and is founded with a strong relationship with God. That's where Solomon starts his reign as king. And it will continue to be the cornerstone of his reign. Which is why he's always referred as a wise king throughout the Bible.

We model that wisdom by remembering that God is our cornerstone. Cornerstone of the church. Cornerstone of our very lives.

Move 3: Hard right vs. easy wrong

One of my mentors in college told me, "Pat, it's okay to confess you are a sinner, but be careful that you don't celebrate it." He would always say, "Grace changes us. It transforms us to seek the hard right versus following the easy wrong."

The reality is that we are all—like David, Solomon, and the leaders after them—imperfect. As Lutherans, we confess we are all simultaneously saints and sinners.

However, that doesn't mean we just go out and act willy-nilly. We confess Christ. We know the God of relationship. Of steadfast love. That knowledge, those experiences we have of God moments. That knowledge, those stories of grace in action. They transform us. They cause us to live differently.

We have a way too easy time in American Christianity picking and choosing where our faith applies. Faith isn't just confined to the walls of St. Mark's and the walls of our homes. Faith applies to the streets we drive on. The schools we learn in. The workplaces we work at. The neighborhoods in which we reside. We live out our faith in every arena and space in which we spend time.

Living wisely. It isn't knowing a bunch of Scripture verses. That's being smart. It's not knowing about God and about the guy Jesus. That's information. That's knowledge.

Being like Solomon. Living wisely is living out the life the Bible calls us to live.

Lots of people can quote the Bible. Few live and bring the Bible to life.

That's what holy wisdom entails. It entails applying Jesus' teachings. Integrating the lessons from characters and stories of the Old Testament into our daily lives. Taking knowledge. Taking the good and the bad from our past. And allowing God to use all of it.

For God's will and work. To bring glory to God. To transform this world filled with darkness, division, and hatred into a world full of light, unity, and love.

Move 4: Seeking God's voice and discerning God's will

As the Church, we are called to seek God's will. To discern together what God is up to in our midst. As a community and as disciples, this is our call and our challenge.

Solomon had a huge undertaking in trying to discern what was next. And the first place he turned was God.

As I was growing up, when I was facing a hard decision, my dad would always tell me the same thing. It annoyed me, but now I live by it. When faced with a tough choice, I would ask my dad for guidance, and he'd always ask, "Did you pray about it."

And in the beginning, I would respond with anger, saying I was all prayed out. But, later, I would always find myself praying. Submitting myself to God. Praying for God's guidance. Praying for that closeness. Praying for direction. Praying I would know God's voice over others.

And what prayer always does is get me out of my own way and start to realign my heart back to God. Prayer isn't a wish list. Prayer isn't shallow. Prayer is about deep connection. It's about our hearts and minds being aligned with God's. It entails communicating our deep needs and then stepping back to listen and look for God's response.

Solomon started his reign in prayer. And throughout his time as king, he returned to that place. Of worship. Of listening. Of closeness.

That's my prayer for all of us. That we seek and find authentic relationship with God, with each other, and with people in our community. A relationship so close that others stop and ponder.

Hopefully, one that doesn't get the cops called on you. But one that causes people to wonder. That invites people in. That points people to our awesome God.

Amen.

Resources:

[1] Howard, Cameron. "Commentary on 1 Kings 2: 10-12; 3:3-14" Workingpreacher.org. August 19, 2018.

[2] Galvin, Garrett. "Commentary on 1 Kings 2: 10-12; 3:3-14" Workingpreacher.org. August 16, 2015.

[3] Galvin, Garrett. "Commentary on 1 Kings 2: 10-12; 3:3-14" Workingpreacher.org. August 16, 2015.

[4] Howard, Cameron. "Commentary on 1 Kings 2: 10-12; 3:3-14" Workingpreacher.org. August 19, 2018.

[5] Gavin, Garrett. "Commentary on 1 Kings 2: 10-12; 3:3-14" Workingpreacher.org. August 16, 2015.

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