

Solomon – the wise!

1 Kings 3: 16-28; 6: 1-14

Today we come to the final chapter of the misbehaving monarchs that we have been following throughout the month of July. We heard the story of Samuel, a cleric who wanted to lead a nation only to be followed by Saul, who was the first to be offered the job to be king of this new nation, but was unfortunately not given the proper training and failed miserably, and let's be honest, the beloved of God was standing in the wings for the job; that being David. David was a political strategist; mastermind and he played the game well in taking the leadership from Saul.

David as we heard over the last few weeks had a long and successful reign which then got off track when he started to look inward rather than to the interest of the common good. And that brings us to today; Solomon, who is commonly thought of as very, very wise. Now unlike Samuel, Saul and David, Solomon was chosen to reign by his father the king, with the cunning help of the prophet Nathan, and his mother Bathsheba. So rather than being named and chosen by God, he was put forth to King David through the help of his mother and through a message that Nathan received, probably not from God, and probably from a smart woman. And there he was, David declares Solomon would be the one to replace him after his very long reign of at least 33 years. And so, David instructed his own men to take Solomon where he would be anointed ruler of Israel. Solomon was to ride in on David's mule as a symbol of his new leadership and he would sit in David's throne and be blessed by David.

This is all great. David's life, however, was coming to an end and so Solomon spent some time with his father as a good son would. And David, being the father that he was, thought he needed to share with Solomon what he was to do in his stead. So, here were the instructions that King David gave to Solomon:

1. Be strong and courageous. Often fathers want their sons to carry on their legacy and this is one of David's great strengths. He managed to conquer so many in his time.
2. Follow God's ways and keep God's statutes, commandments, ordinances, and testimonies for this was key to David's success.
3. Take care of Joab the commander of David's army whose hands were full of blood. So, he did that by executing him.
4. Be kind to the sons of this other person so that he would still be on their side, and;

5. He was supposed to take care of another guy named Shimei, who cursed and pelted David with stones. So, he had to go, he couldn't be trusted. So, Shimei was put on house arrest and then later killed.¹

Solomon took these wishes of his father to heart. He took care of the traitors and the rebels alike and tied up the loose ends of David's reign. And once this was done he was free to get on with his own plan. Now Solomon had a different leadership style. He was not charismatic like his father, he was not particularly skilled in the art of war, but he was good at organization and administration.

Solomon was a man on a mission and lucky for him he reigned during a relatively peaceful period, so he didn't have to worry about being a political strategist or being skilled in the art of war. He was wise to begin with by marrying the Pharaoh's daughter and that brought an alliance with Egypt. And during his reign he married many daughters to bring the kingdom into unity and in fact it's reported that he had 700 princesses and 300 concubines; now you can judge for yourself whether this was wise. He then appointed a new commander and then a chief of the army and brought in a new priest. So, everything was set, he was pretty good.

And early on in his reign we hear an account of a dream that Solomon had and, in this dream,, Solomon had a conversation with God. God asked Solomon one question: What is it that you want? Solomon started by acknowledging that he knew how loved his father had been and that David had truly been the chosen one of God and chosen by God to lead the people and he acknowledged his own fear of not feeling worthy of the call to lead God's people even though this was his father's desire. So, in his humbleness and true sincerity, Solomon asked for only one thing. He asked, "God give your servant therefore and understanding mind to govern your people and the ability to discern, between good and evil."

You know as well as I do that the past monarchs and many leaders in power throughout history and including today focus on things like wealth and power. Many seek security through might, but not Solomon. Solomon chose wisely to quote from Indiana Jones. Solomon desired and asked for a heart to serve and strength to walk in God's ways and God was happy with what Solomon asked for in this dream and declared that it would be granted to him along with everything else if he promised to walk in God's footsteps and in God's ways. Now after receiving this message in his dream his wisdom was put to the test as we heard today in the scripture, in the story of needing to give judgment to two women on which the living son belonged to. So, what made Solomon wise? It was his discerning spirit. If you think back to this story Solomon didn't actually just make a judgment based on the facts; what he did do was listen to the testimonies of the women and through listening to their reaction of his suggestion to split the son in half, basically killing the only living son left, he heard compassion in only one woman's voice and that woman was the mother of the son that was still alive. So, he was wise

¹ Barbara J. Essex, *Misbehavin' Monarchs; Exploring Biblical Kings of Questionable Character*, (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), p. 100-101

because he listened. As I said there were many styles of leadership and today we see the leadership of a man who listened and discerned.

Discernment is an important spiritual practice that we engage in in the church and specifically here at Robertson-Wesley, where we seek to find more time and ways to listen for God's voice, to listen to where the Spirit is moving us and calling us. I believe that it is through the practice of discernment and intentional listening, that Solomon, unlike the previous monarchs, was able to unite 12 different tribes and move them towards a unified nation. He created a new structure being such a great administrator, that it was no longer tribal in that sense, he named 12 chief administrators; some of you might point out that this was just wordsmithing. And then he formed two circles, those of you from Robertson-Wesley will know that we have PODS; could be very similar. Two circles with the role of working for the common good. He also brought in a new tax schedule and had a very aggressive building program that required a lot of resources and labour, for he wanted to build a temple for God, which his father had not been allowed to do. But at the same time, he was building a palace for himself and somehow the palace ended up bigger and higher than the temple and you can well imagine how that went over. So, Solomon, though he was wise, got off track.

In one of the books I was reading they said he was the wisest idiot of them all. Turns out he also loved forbidden women. And the final nail in the coffin, was that he started to worship these women's' Gods and Goddesses and even went so far as to build altars for them. He forgot his promise to follow in God's ways and footsteps and to heed God's commandments. Now as you know it's easy to get caught up and forget our original intentions when we get involved in something new, in a new project, in a new opportunity. Humans are very good at rationalizing what we're doing in that moment and somehow even Solomon who was such a wise person still did dumb things. Now what we can learn from Solomon is that there are times when obedience to God and faithfulness to God's commandments are the wisest choice. It's true that we can gain experience and when we do, over time we think we know what's best and we stop listening. It thinks it is very timely to hear the story of Solomon at the end of the General Council meeting week as Leigh mentioned earlier in the service.

General Council is the highest level of our church it's the national part of our church, and the group that gathered and through many conversations across this country we have agreed to restructure. The structure that had been in place, that had come together through uniting several different denominations, just imagine those 12 tribes; a whole bunch of different denominations trying to come together in common agreement which then created the United Church of Canada. This structure served us well for a long time, but it has become a financial burden and in some ways, there is a lot of redundancy in our four court system where we have out local (our city basically), our provincial and the national levels like the government. In wanting to restructure the national church, in restructuring how we govern ourselves here at Robertson-Wesley; both of those come out of a desire to unleash the Holy Spirit and empower the people, to go back to our

roots, the grass roots, where the power is with the people not from the top. It comes from the grassroots.

But, with this restructuring and with this intention, we need to have trust. We need to trust in one another, we need to trust in where God is leading us. And, the only way to trust in where God is leading us is to discern where God is leading us which means we need to listen I am always amazed at how in times of change we can remember the good parts and we somehow forget the ways that the structures have failed us, and so we cling on to those good pieces and say we don't want to let this go, we are going to be a mess if we don't do it. But in our desire as a national church to become truly intercultural we do need to change our structure and I am so grateful that people have taken this leap and are trusting that it is time. We have learned that the church has failed to listen to people who have been marginalized in our church. We have failed to listen to the stories and voices of all people and instead have listened mostly to the dominant culture. At the General Council meeting people of the dominant culture, being white, were acknowledging the need to take responsibility for our own learning, and it was proclaimed that we also need to acknowledge and admit our part in things and issues and frustrations that have discriminated and not respected marginalized people. We've missed the wisdom of many. So, as we answer the call as a national church to look through this intercultural lens I hope that we can learn from Solomon and heed David's call which was to be courageous and to trust in God and to listen for the wisdom of all. There was a very powerful moment at the end of the General Council meeting where the call was for people who were white to sit down and not speak at the mic; and they invited people of different cultures to come forward and share their stories of when they have been hurt and discriminated against within the church. I believe it was about 2 hours that they listened and something amazing happened in that moment and if you read some of the comments from our new moderator you will hear that he too saw that these moments were transformational. When we sit and listen we are moved, we are changed, and the Spirit is at work, not us.

So, we are called today to trust in that spirit, to trust in each other and to make space and room for all people to participate in the life of the church. Being less structured allows this to happen. So, I hope this week as you go forth that you will listen for the wisdom that you've missed. Think about whose voice you haven't listened to, it might be your loved one, it might be a stranger on the street, but listen for the wisdom and the words and the heart of God being proclaimed in every single one of us. For that diversity brings a wealth of knowledge and understanding and that is how we are going to move forward and live out God's promise in this world. And for this we give God thanks.

Amen.