

Hillcrest Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
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What would you ask?  
I Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14, Ephesians 5:15-20

We have recently heard about King Saul, the first king of Israel, who became a disappointment when he stopped listening to God. His replacement was King David. Anointed when just a shepherd boy, David built up the nation and established a time of peace. But he was not allowed to build a temple for God. Now David sleeps with his fathers (has died), and his son Solomon, has become king.

Our lectionary reading skips some interesting verses. Solomon has just finished solidifying his hold on the kingdom- he has had executed any of those who might have challenged his right to be king.

This was on the advice of his father David, who put him in the situation by naming Solomon king when there were so many possible challengers for the throne. Solomon has successfully eliminated an older brother, the priest who advised the older brother, and his father's former General- Joab. Although in chapter 3 verse 8, Solomon says he is a mere child, (scholars believe he was 20 years old), he certainly seems to have a good grasp on political intrigue, and is not afraid to take the actions necessary to secure his rule in a harsh world!

But his father David seemed to think Solomon was the right person, even a wise person to become king. Solomon works at following his father's God and he worships in all the right places, making 1000s of sacrifices. Then one day, God comes to Solomon in a dream and says, "Solomon, ask of me what ever you would have me give you." Wow! Anything?! If God asked me that question I might have to think for a moment. Wouldn't you?

But Solomon doesn't seem to even hesitate. He asks God for an understanding mind, the ability to discern between good and evil so that he can govern God's people. And the scripture says that this request so pleased God, that God also gave him what he did not ask for: riches, honor, and a long life. In return, God asked only that Solomon walk in God's ways just as his father David did.

In time, King Solomon became renowned throughout history, for the enormous prosperity of Israel during his rule, and the construction of a great tabernacle for the ark, a dwelling place for God. But he is perhaps known most of all for his wisdom. The first display of his wisdom we hear about comes in a child custody dispute.

Two women come to Solomon with a baby boy. They both claim to be the baby's mother. They live in the same house. They both claim that other woman's baby died while she was sleeping. The women didn't have a witness, and there was no DNA testing in that day. It was just one mother's word against the other's. What was Solomon to do to render justice?

Solomon settles the dispute in a very dramatic way. He calls for a sword so he can divide the baby in half. If there was no way to tell who the baby truly belongs to – then Solomon would give them each a piece. That way both women will get equal treatment before the law. One of the women seems satisfied with this decision. The true mother of the child is distraught and cries out, "No! She can have him, only let the baby live!" And so the puzzle is solved, the baby is given to his true mother, and the people were amazed at Solomon's wisdom.

But Solomon was not always wise. He used his wisdom to govern well, but he did not always use wisdom in his personal life and relationship with God. Over time, Solomon marries women from foreign countries in order to solidify political relationships and to secure and build up his kingdom. He allows these arrangements and his wives to draw him away from his

relationship with the one true God. He started as a humble lad, worshipping God and asking God to grant him wisdom. But over time he allows the temptations of earthly wealth and prestige to overcome him.

In our reading from Ephesians this morning, Paul exhorts us to be wise. Now we are not kings, and there will be no threats to split a baby here. Instead, when Paul counsels us to be wise- he is telling us to be careful how we live. One translation says to be careful how we “walk,” meaning to be sure that we walk in the Way, as Jesus has shown us the way.

Paul exhorts us to make the most of our lives, living and walking in the Way because just as Solomon experienced, there are many temptations in our lives. Verse 17 states it plainly: do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Paul is saying that wisdom is knowing, and living, the will of God.

And the will of God, how do we know what that is? Two answers come to mind. First, remember what Paul said earlier in his letter to the Ephesians- live in love. The church in Ephesus has had problems, splits, arguments, gossip and Paul tells them there is a better way. He has written before, forgive each other, work to build each other up, most of all, live in love. Here he encourages them to be filled with the Spirit, and to sing songs together and to each other. Living bound together by the Spirit, in joy and giving thanks to God, at all times and for everything.

So, what if God gave you the opportunity that Solomon had? What if God came to you in a dream, and said, “Ask of me what ever you would have me give you.” What would you ask for? Think about it for a second. How many of you would be able to answer that question right away? What would it be? Would you ask to be pain free, healed, a cure for cancer, world peace, prosperity, long life?

Have any of you thought what it might be like to find a magic lamp with a genie, and be granted three wishes? Would you try to leverage your one wish- so that whatever you asked for resulted in multiple gifts, multiple impacts, not just for you, but for many people?

Lest you think that this is a silly or fruitless exercise, remember Jesus said, “Ask and it shall be given, knock and it shall be opened, seek and you will find.” As we leave today, we will sing the song, Spirit of Gentleness. It is a song of hope and future. The last verse includes words of the prophet Isaiah. God’s people had experienced great tragedy. So many bad things had happened to them. They despaired of any hope for a future. They wondered how they could ever be a community again. Yet the prophet called them and calls us to new possibilities in God.

Months ago, I was asked if I thought there was hope for this church, if there was any possible future. I tell you with out hesitation, yes! We serve a God who calls from tomorrow, and can break the ancient schemes of anger, hurt, despair, disappointment, and hopelessness. We are called to throw off the bondage of sorrow and bitterness. Walking in the way, living in God’s wisdom, and with God, anything is possible. So our women and men and young people can see visions, clear their eyes of darkness, and begin to dream God’s dreams for the future.

So what is it that you would ask God for? What would you ask God for this church? Ask it now! We have the assurance, God will answer. And with God’s answer, God will empower us to become a community. Then together, we will make the bold new decisions that will take us into the future that God has dreamed for Hillcrest. Then just watch this people arise! Amen.