

“Ask Of The Lord” – 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 – Aug 16, 2015

He had to have felt overwhelmed – Solomon, that is. Oh, to be sure ... he was and still may be considered the greatest king Israel has ever had; however, on this occasion he surely must have felt like he was terribly in over his head. Although he had just been confirmed as the king I suspect he probably realized he was the least likely of all candidates to be named to that position. In order for us to understand why, having been placed in the ultimate position of power, that he might or perhaps even must have felt a sense of inadequacy, we must first begin to understand how he came to the throne.

It helps to remember that the time of Saul, David, and Solomon was a period in Israel's history that made the current activities by the ISIS terrorists look like peaceful negotiations. When you read through the Old Testament passages that portray these times then murder, intrigue, warfare, political assassinations, rebellions, treachery, betrayals all seem like a normal part of life. Solomon's predecessors, Saul and David, both rose to prominence and the kingship in large part because of their great prowess in battle and in leading armies. Saul is presented as a hugely powerful warrior king, noted for slaying Ammonites and Philistines by the thousands. In contrast David seems to have been ten times better (or worse, depending on your perspective), as the Philistine commanders are quoted as saying, "Is this not David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" This was at a time when David was trying to ally with the Philistines to defeat Saul ... the details of all those intrigues are way too long and complicated to go into here. Suffice it to say that while the David and Goliath story is perhaps the most well-known (or at least known-about as few people remember the details) of the biblical accounts boosting the fame of David's deeds there are many, many other accounts that tell of his gory accomplishments. Over the past three weeks we have also observed some of David's dalliances and failings out of which came several sons, the most memorable of whom is the subject of our reading today – Solomon.

The accounts of Solomon's accession to the throne are totally different from the "hero kings" that preceded him ... so different in fact that Solomon is literally presented as a bit of a "momma's boy." It's a long and complicated tale, so I'll just hit the highlights. When David was on his death bed being comforted by Abishag the Shunammite, we are told that one of his sons, a certain Adonijah exalted himself, saying, "I will be king" and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. Adonijah was David's second-born, after Absalom, and after rounding up some support from the priest Abiathar he threw a great feast inviting among others all his brothers except Solomon. Unlike his predecessors Solomon didn't raise an army and solve the throne succession issue in the normal bloodthirsty way. Instead, his mother (Bathsheba) and the prophet Nathan went to David and not only told him what Adonijah was doing but reminded David of the promise he had made to Bathsheba that Solomon would be made king. David made good on his promise, had Solomon ride the royal mule down to Gihon where the trumpet was sounded and the pronouncement was made that "Solomon is king!"

When the guests at Adonijah's feast heard this news, they all "got up trembling and went their own ways" while the host took sanctuary by "grabbing the horns of the altar." Solomon had him brought before him, admonished him, and sent him home. As David was failing, in his final acts he counseled Solomon on the one hand to "be strong, be courageous, walk in the way of the Lord ..." and on the other hand (to paraphrase), "take care of a few potential enemies, including that miserable Joab who betrayed me."

This is where we enter into the reading, at least the first little bit, but we then skip over a section of more lust and bloodshed in which Solomon settled into the kingship by having Adonijah and Joab executed, banishing the priest Abiathar, executing Shimei, and marrying a daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh. He may have obtained the throne through his mother's efforts, but he knew how to make a "clean start!"

So far the background music in this lurid drama has been mostly war drums and spooky organ music, signaling dastardly deeds of betrayal and murder. But here, however, in the second part of our reading there is an abrupt shift to gentle flute and harp music, underscoring Solomon being such a faithful and righteous person, "loving the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David." If we simply begin looking at this text with only that gentle, sacred music as a background without recognizing and understanding the hugely jolting and jarring shift it represents from what had gone on up to this point, we miss noting how adrift Solomon must have felt. The only hint we have in our reading of displeasure at Solomon is the tiny, almost apologetic "only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places" – which was seen by later authors as a bit of a heresy, although the apology is presented just before our reading that "the house of the Lord – i.e. the Temple – had not yet been built."

So, here's Solomon, freshly installed as king not by dint of warrior capabilities but rather with the help of his mother and Nathan. As I said, he had to have felt a bit overwhelmed, even if he had gotten rid of the key potential enemies right off the bat, so to speak. And then God asks him, "what do you want from me?" Ah yes, what indeed? What would he ask of God? How would we respond to such a question from God? I suspect most of us would answer like anyone else, asking for relief from illness or pain, sufficient wealth to be comfortable, happiness, and oh yes, world peace. Solomon, however, displaying the wisdom with which he would eventually be so solidly identified, asked instead for "an understanding mind ... able to distinguish between good and evil", a request which pleased God enough to grant that wish and also all the unasked-for benefits of wealth and prosperity for all his life. Solomon apparently was granted his request, for he continued to gain the reputation of being the wisest king that reigned over Israel. We note also that his shiny new gift was immediately tested with the issue of the one baby claimed by two mothers – the archetypical example of his wisdom in action.

Few if any of us will ever have the experience of being asked directly by God, "what do you want from me?" but all of us need to realize that the question is still being asked of us by God, and moreover live in the assurance that God is indeed standing by and listening for our requests, known by the more familiar name of prayers. Prayers include several identifiable components, such as ascription of glory ("O Lord, you are so great and good!"), confession ("I have done bad!"), repentance ("I'm sorry!"), and petition ("Please give me ..."). The last part, petition, is where we ask of the Lord that which we would like to have.

The problem for most of us, when we are asking of the Lord, is that we don't think big enough, or broadly enough, or powerfully enough. Most times we ask for God to solve our issues and problems with the solutions that we think are best, when a much more powerful approach – like Solomon's – is to ask for God to take care of it. Leaving God to provide the appropriate answer to our prayer is, of course, much more difficult because it requires great faith and even greater patience. Doing so requires that we trust God to act, and because the solution(s) may not be what we expected we may not even recognize God's hand at work, unless of course we are truly prepared to let God work it through in an optimal way.

You've heard me relate – and the other redevelopment team members share this experience – my experience of waking up in the middle of the night wondering "oh my God,

what have we gotten ourselves into?!” only to be reminded by the soft, comforting message from God saying, “relax, it’s not your project, it’s mine!” As particular issues come up and I feel the urge to find a solution, I am reminded of this passage time and again, and use it to relax and let God sort out the solution – which, I will add, he has done so far in ways that far exceed what I might have suggested!

The same is true for each one of us – it is difficult to let go, to ask God to come up with the best solution instead of asking God to implement our solutions and it is even harder to have the faith that supports and undergirds the patience required to wait for it. But I think you’ll agree with me that on those times when you have asked such a request of God, and moreover asked for the peace and patience needed, that you have indeed experienced an outcome that is far better than you could have imagined.

That’s the key message here; not that we can like Solomon be crowned as king or queen, or that we can be in a position of huge authority, but rather that we can and should have the faith and wisdom to ask of the Lord for appropriate help and support. If we do so, like with Solomon, God will not only answer our wishes and our prayers but God will also grant us additional blessing upon blessing.

I’m not saying it’s easy – I’m just saying that it’s very worthwhile. Be prepared, and when the next occasion arises when you are in conversation with God and he asks “what do you want from me?” you’ll be ready to take your cue from Solomon and answer wisely.