

**Wise Up!** (I Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14; John 6:51-58; Ephesians 5:15-20)

Imagine that it's your birthday. After everyone sings "Happy Birthday" to you, it gets quiet, and you're told to make a wish. Before you blow out the candles, you stop to think what one thing you would like to request.

In a way, this is what happened to Solomon centuries ago. Solomon had a dream, and in the dream, God told him, "Ask what I should give you." Make a wish!

Think about your life right now. If you had the opportunity to make one request that would be granted, what would it be? Enough money so that you wouldn't have to worry about money any longer, so that you'd have money to buy a house, or to fix all the repairs that need to be made on your home, or to buy a new car, or to give away money to help others in need? Would you ask for a job? Or, would it be health or a different body that you'd ask for? Or how about a special someone with whom you could share your life? Or would you ask for more peace in your life, in your family?

So many possibilities. So many choices. So many things, no doubt, that each of us would like to have. But how many of us would turn our backs on money, health, a special person in our lives, peace in our families and instead ask for wisdom?

Nonetheless, that's exactly what Solomon asked for. God said, "Ask what I should give you," and Solomon answered that wisdom was what he wanted--wisdom was his deepest desire. Solomon said, "Give your servant...an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil..." (I Kings 3:9)

Now, King Solomon was a Hebrew. So to understand the wisdom Solomon requested, we must understand what he, as a Jew, meant by wisdom, for he wasn't talking about intelligence, a high IQ, or even a first-rate education.

The Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokmah*, and there are three parts to its meaning. First, *hokmah* is the desire to take the time to really see and listen to what is going on before you--so that you completely understand. Second, wisdom is the ability to discern or distinguish or recognize the truth,

especially being able to tell if something is good or evil. Third, it's the ability, based on careful listening and observing and knowing God's right from wrong, to make good judgments or decisions.

A few verses after today's story of Solomon having the dream in which he asked for wisdom, there's another story. And this second story was obviously selected to be in the Older Testament to show that God granted Solomon's request and gave him wisdom.

This second story is one most of us probably grew up hearing as an example of wisdom. According to the story, two prostitutes came to King Solomon. One woman told the king that she and the other woman had both had babies, but one night, the other woman rolled over on her own baby, and the baby died. Thus the other woman switched her dead baby for the living baby. The two women then began arguing before the king about whose baby it was who had died.

According to the scripture, "The king said, 'Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other.' But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—'Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!' The other said, 'It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.' Then the king responded: 'Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.' All Israel heard of the judgment (or *hokmah*--wisdom) that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice."

Solomon cared enough to take the time to really see and listen to what was going on before him--so that he could understand where the women were coming from. Solomon thus was able to see the truth--to detect evil in the one woman's willingness to kill and divide the child. Therefore, Solomon made a good judgment in returning the child to the woman who loved the child so much that she was willing to let him go. Wisdom is the desire to take the time to really see and listen to what is going on before you--so that you understand. It's the ability to recognize the truth, especially concerning good and evil. It's the ability to make good decisions or judgments.

One day interviews were held for the position of president of a large

corporation. And three people applied for the job. The first person was asked, "How much is two plus two?" The applicant excused himself from the room and proceeded to make a series of measurements and calculations before returning and answering, "Four." The second applicant was then interviewed and asked, "How much is two plus two?" And so this person excused herself from the room, went to the laboratory, did some experiments, and then returned and announced: "Four." Finally, the third person was interviewed, and just like the others, he was asked: "How much is two plus two?" But this third applicant pulled down all the shades in the room, looked outside the door to see if anyone was there, checked the telephone to see if it was bugged, and then whispered, "How much is two plus two, you say. Well, how much do you *want* it to be?"

We live in a world where unfortunately this thinking is becoming more and more common. Far too few people are really interested in listening and observing to discover the truth. For example, do you think all of those persons we've been seeing on our television sets, so upset about the health care reform that they're carrying posters, disrupting town meetings, making threats to their representatives in Congress have actually read for themselves every word of the legislation in question? Do you think that their passion comes from a desire to understand the truth and thus make a good judgment for all people involved or from something someone said through the media to manipulate their emotions?

We all know that some talk show hosts and even some news programs make a fortune by telling us not the truth but rather what they know some of us want to hear. I've shared with you before how someone near and dear to me even told me that she didn't care if the station she listens to tells her the truth, cause what they tell her agrees with what she believes and what she wants to believe. But this certainly doesn't meet the biblical definition of wisdom, does it?

According to the Bible, is it wisdom for us to allow any station or politician or person or prejudice to manipulate us? Solomon certainly didn't allow the one prostitute to manipulate him.

The story of Solomon is God's way of telling us how important it is for us to desire and seek wisdom for ourselves. God wants us to really see and listen

to what is going on around us--so that we understand. God doesn't want us to make up our own truth; he wants us to diligently seek the truth--his truth, especially concerning good and evil. He wants us to carefully make good decisions or judgments as we journey through our lives.

There's a story about a man whose hobby was mountain climbing. He had climbed all the 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado and finally had the opportunity to go to Switzerland and climb the Matterhorn. With a guide, he made his way to the top of this difficult mountain. The wind was blowing fiercely. He and the guide were exhausted. The man and the guide had to crawl their way the last few feet to the top. Then the man began to stand up to enjoy the incredible view. But the guide grabbed him and pulled him down, telling him, "Here in the wind and the danger at the top of the mountain, if we try to stand on our own, we'll be blown off to our deaths. We can only be here on our knees."

Well, in the wind and the danger of living in this world, if we try to stand on our own, deciding for ourselves what the truth is, making decisions based on our own ideas and desires or allowing others to manipulate us, similarly, we'll be blown to our deaths. It's important that we, like Solomon, be aware of our own inadequacy, as well as the inadequacy of those who all too often seek to manipulate us. Solomon didn't take the easy way and allow his advisors to give him the facts as they saw them. And he didn't even trust in his own ability to know the truth and make good decisions. Solomon knew that that on his own, he wouldn't be able to know the truth, to determine right from wrong, to make good decisions. So he turned to God. He asked for wisdom from God. He asked for the wisdom of God.

Wisdom is indeed probably the greatest need that we and our world have. And thanks be to God, we don't have to wait for God to speak to us in a dream to have the much needed wisdom from God.

For, the New Testament states that Jesus is "the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:24). Jesus is the way that we can really see and listen to what is going on around us--so that we understand. He shows us how to seek the truth, especially concerning good and evil. He wants to help us carefully make good decisions or judgments. Just think about how often Jesus stressed really listening and really opening our eyes to what's going on around us. And how often he talked about the truth. And how much he

stressed the importance of carefully weighed decisions. We're not suppose to do what others tell us to do or what we want to do. We're to look to Jesus as and for "the way, the truth, and the light."

A little girl was sitting in church with her family one Sunday morning. During Communion, she heard the minister speak the words Jesus said in our gospel lesson for day: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51). Hearing this, the child blurted out, "Oh, yuk!"

Now, taken at face value, Jesus' words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood have often made those in the world say, "Oh, yuk." In fact, these words of Jesus were used by the early enemies of the Christians to accuse them of being cannibals.

But Jesus wasn't advocating cannibalism. Instead, Jesus was, as he always did, taking something at hand, something very common, bread and wine, to make a point. And his point is that we are to ingest him, to take him within ourselves, so that he's the center of our lives. We're to do this by thoroughly knowing the gospels with his words and his actions. We're to also ingest him by knowing him one-on-one, personally, in prayer, spending time with him daily, as we would a close friend. We're to take him within ourselves, for, as the doctors tell us, "we are what we eat."

I read of a woman who went to work for a prominent church as a wedding hostess. "I've always loved being in church," she said, "and I thought it would be a wonderful position. But was I ever wrong! In all my years of working, I have never encountered such pettiness, meanness, and downright rudeness as I experienced in a month in that position." She soon resigned from the position and left that church. She ran into too many people who professed to be followers of Jesus but really hadn't taken him into their hearts and souls and minds, so that they had the wisdom of God guiding their behavior, their decisions, their living.

Friends, if we have Jesus within us, the wisdom of God will be evident in us, as it was in Jesus. We will not take the easy way in making decisions. We will not rely on our own thinking. We will not allow others to use fears and

prejudices to manipulate us. We will take the time to really see and listen to what is going on before us--so that we truly understand. We will seek the truth, especially concerning good and evil. We will want to make decisions and judgments, just as Jesus did, based on love, community, compassion, forgiveness, justice, peace, and hope.

How different our lives and our communities are when we ingest Jesus, "the wisdom of God," to the point that we can do this. No wonder our epistle lesson for today tells us, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise..." (Ephesians 5:15). Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; August 16, 2009