

Series: Worship with Rejoicing
Sermon: Benediction
Scripture: 1 KINGS 2:10-12, 3:3-14

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10 Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. **11** The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. **12** So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established. **3** Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. **4** The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. **5** At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." **6** And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. **7** And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. **8** And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. **9** Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" **10** It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. **11** God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, **12** I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. **13** I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. **14** If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

When I was a child, my mother kept our enormous family bible out on the coffee table as a centerpiece. Most of you probably have a bible like that filled with newspaper clippings and church bulletins from significant Sundays in the life of the family. Those Bibles came with places to record family births, deaths, and baptisms, and many of them, like ours, included a section in the center with beautiful classic paintings depicting Biblical stories in bright colors and sometimes frightening imagery.

I can vividly remember the picture I turned to the most was a painting by Peter Paul Rubens, in 1617 called Solomon's judgement. It was a terrifying and confusing painting for a child who had no context to the Biblical story it represented. All a child sees is a king sitting on the throne, two women standing before him, one standing smugly and the other falling to her knees in distress. On the floor before her is a baby, obviously

deceased, and hovering over it, a soldier holds another baby, obviously distressed, upside down by one ankle and has raised his sword above his head as if he is about to strike the baby with it. Like I said, a horrible and confusing image for a child to find in the bible, a book that they have been taught holds stories of cute animals on arks and sweet lambs to snuggle on.

It wasn't until I was older that I learned the story was meant to show us about the wisdom of King Solomon. As the story goes, two women who lived together each had a baby. One woman rolled over in her sleep and accidentally suffocated her child and when she woke to find him deceased, she snuck into the other woman's room and swapped her dead child for the other woman's living child. In the day before DNA testing, how would they determine which woman was the biological mother? King Solomon had the wisdom to judge that the real mother would do anything for the sake of her child, so he devised a plan. He would order his soldier to split the baby in half and each woman would get half of the child. As he predicted, one woman became so distressed that she immediately withdrew her complaint, "No! She can have him, please don't kill him. Let him live." The other woman was satisfied with the verdict, she said, go ahead, seems fair. Of course, the infant wasn't harmed, Solomon said obviously the woman who was willing to give the child up was the real mother and he returned the child to her.

I was much older before I realized that simply having compassion to spare the child's life didn't really prove that she was the biological mother, but it did prove she would be the better parent to raise the child. So, Solomon's wisdom still holds.

Of course, I also learned, as I got older that Solomon might have been wise, but there is a difference in being able to discern right from wrong and actually doing right and wrong. For example, as we see in today's text, he worshipped in the "high places," even though the Jewish people were commanded not to do so because of its association with pagan worship. He, like his father, wasn't perfect, and yet we are told, despite his imperfections, Solomon loved the Lord and kept the statutes of his father David. Solomon tried. but he wasn't perfect.

Most of us know a thing or two about that. We love the Lord, we try to live appropriately, but we aren't perfect...we can easily find justification to do things that seem good, only later to determine that they weren't the best choices. Maybe Solomon was already wise, because he seemed to realize early on that he really don't know what he is doing...and isn't that half the battle? We sometimes have to go deep into the valley of consequences before we are ready to admit we don't have a clue what we are supposed to do.

So, when God appears to Solomon in a dream and asks, "What should I give you?" Solomon is quick to answer. I need wisdom. I don't know how to lead your people, I'm

immature, I'm unqualified, I need help. It is immediately obvious that Solomon has asked for something that pleases God immensely but look closely as why God is happy with Solomon's desire for wisdom. "*Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word.*"

Notice, Solomon didn't ask for himself...he wasn't selfish. He didn't ask for destruction or death for his enemies...he wasn't hard hearted. He asked for wisdom, which is pleasing to God because it means applying what we know in order to benefit others. If King Solomon is wise, and leads wisely, it will benefit the whole people of Israel and through them, the world.

True wisdom means being able to discern right from wrong and sometimes we must also be able to appreciate the nuances of all situations so that we can choose the side of justice and mercy. This what God wants us to desire, because when we choose justice and mercy, it benefits everyone. Solomon has every resource at his disposal to be king of Israel – vast wealth, a great army, a multitude of people willing to follow – but he will need to know the way to lead them, and only God can show him the way.

God is pleased to grant Solomon's request and even goes further and grants an extra blessing, a benediction, if you will, that Solomon didn't even ask for, but that blessing is rooted in the fact that what Solomon did ask for was pleasing to God. If Solomon is truly wise and walks in the way of God and leads his people accordingly, God will be glorified and when God is gloried by our living, then our living is a blessing.

Each week, at the end of our worship, I offer a benediction. Bene-dicteo means "a good word" and it serves as a blessing for all who have worshipped – a good word from the Lord who has met us where we are and now sends us out a bit wiser than we were.

The benediction is a blessing that reminds us that there is no period at the end of our worship service...but, instead, a comma...worship continues because we leave this place, hopefully a bit more wise to the ways of God and feeling a bit more prepared to follow God as we disperse out into our community, living in ways that glorify God, benefit others, and appreciate the nuances of each situation, as we align with the side of justice and mercy. As God blessed Solomon beyond what Solomon asked for, so God's blessings are abundant for us – in wisely following God's way of justice and mercy, we are blessed and we become a blessing to others as we go.

Even as a child, I worried for the woman who was falling on her knees before Solomon, begging for the life of a child. I don't know if it was hers or she just had compassion for it, but either way, it was saved by Solomon's wisdom and her mercy. I think this is the point God is making...wisdom leads to blessing.

We leave with God's blessing – a blessing that keeps us from stumbling, helps us to stand in joy, and live under God's glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, now and forever. A blessing to receive and a blessing to pass on.