

"Not all It's Cracked Up to be." Psalm 111; 1 Kings 2:1-4; 10-12, 3:1-15
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church
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When we go searching the scriptures for examples of wisdom and of wise ones, Solomon always makes the short list. He is often identified as the author of many of the wise sayings from the Hebrew Scriptures - in the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes for example.

Yes, Solomon was a wise one and today's text illustrates the source of his wisdom. It came as a gift from God. God invited him to ask for anything and Solomon was wise enough to ask for wisdom!

God was pleased with his request and granted it, along with the things he might have asked for but didn't - riches and honor beyond compare.

The rest of the story of Solomon's reign tells of building the Temple in Jerusalem and his palace, the treaty alliances he made, the riches he accumulated, his entertaining of the Queen of Sheba and the peace and security that surrounded him.

It seems he was well-served by his God-given wisdom. But how well-served was he really?

Solomon's reign also included the forced labor of his people for his many building projects and his accumulation of 700 wives and 300 concubines, many of whom were from foreign countries and brought with them their pagan worship practices which Solomon, in his "wisdom", did not forbid.

It seems Solomon's wisdom that was put to good use in the affairs of state did not serve him well in affairs of the heart.

It is Solomon's lax and permissive approach to the pagan worship practices of his women that is cited as the cause of the unraveling of all that had been built up through the reigns of David and Solomon. The united kingdom of Israel only lasts a short time. After Solomon's death, the 10 northern tribes become the nation of Israel and the remaining southern tribes become Judah.

How could someone as "wise" as Solomon allow this to happen? Did he not know the commandments? Did he think the same God who had visited him in a dream and had conferred such wonderful gifts of wisdom and riches and honor upon him would be pleased with such a diluting of the holiness code and the call to worship the Lord alone?

Maybe wisdom isn't all it's cracked up to be? Or, perhaps more to the point, maybe there are different kinds of wisdom, different kinds of intelligence that are evident in different people.

Back in the 1980's an education professor at Harvard University named Howard Gardner developed a theory of "multiple intelligences". Perhaps you've heard of it. He felt that IQ tests were far too limited as a means for assessing intelligence in people. In fact, he identified 8 different intelligences that are present in different combinations and to different degrees in different people. Here are the intelligences he identified:

Linguistic Intelligence - someone who is good with words, "word smart,"
 Logical-Mathematical Intelligence - someone who is good with numbers and reasoning,

Spatial Intelligence - someone who is "picture smart" good with objects

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence - someone who is "body smart",
 physically attuned,

Musical Intelligence - someone who is "music smart",

Interpersonal Intelligence - someone who is "people smart" and good in

social settings,
Intrapersonal Intelligence - someone who is "self smart", "self-aware"
Naturalist Intelligence - someone who is "nature smart", street-smart.

Think of the things you are good at, the things that give you a sense of satisfaction because they come easily to you and because they highlight the areas in which you are gifted. It may be that the things you are good at are not the things that are highly valued in our society. And yet, they are areas of God-given intelligence that are useful to you and to the community.

I am thankful that our Sunday education plan involves a Rotational Model so that the important lessons of the Bible are not being taught in only one way. Instead, we try to engage our students from a variety of avenues toward learning in the hopes that everyone will find ways to encounter the message of God's love and to understand it more fully.

It is interesting to me that "spiritual intelligence" didn't make the list. There are those who are attuned to the work of the Spirit, who understand spiritual things differently and deeper than others.

I think this kind of intelligence is important to strive to develop as we seek to be wise in the use of all our God-given gifts and abilities. Chief among these spiritual attributes is an awareness of God and God's presence in our daily lives.

Along with extolling the characteristics of the Wise, the psalmist identifies the chief characteristic of the "Fool". This is the one who says there is no God. (Ps. 14). For all his wisdom, Solomon acted as though there was no God. Whether he simply forgot his own history, or whether his achievements somehow blinded him to the source of his success, or whether he just began to believe the press clippings about him, we don't know.

What we do know is that even though he was intelligent and wise, Solomon acted foolishly and contrary to God's commands. If only he had continued to see himself as a "little child" before the Lord, one who needed the Lord's guidance and instruction to keep him on the path of righteousness.

After all, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) Wisdom doesn't even make the list. But maybe that's because wisdom is built into the life that acknowledges God's presence and power and purposes achieved throughout history.

Wisdom, the ability to discern and to exercise good judgment, is something that is available to all of us. We don't need to be Solomon. In fact, we see in him the limits of wisdom when it comes to doing what is pleasing in God's sight.

But God has given us the complete revelation of his will in the person of Jesus Christ, who shows us what true devotion to God is all about.

We have the guidance of Scripture, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us. We have the vehicle of prayer, the participation in Christian community and above all, the grace and forgiveness and love of God to sustain us.

Wisdom is important. It is something to desire and to strive for. But, maybe it's not all it's cracked up to be, especially if it makes us think we cannot make bad decisions or if it distances us from God or makes us believe that we don't need God, or anyone else, for that matter.

As followers of Jesus, let us remember our story, take it to heart, learn from it and be guided by it as we seek to be wise in spiritual

things. Let us strive to be discerning disciples, compassionate and loving, concerned for others and trusting in God always, knowing that the source of all true wisdom does not come from us, but from the God who made us in his image, formed us for himself, redeemed us from our sins and our folly, and who sets us free that we might give thanks and praise to God for every good gift.

May it be so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.