

Knowing versus Doing

[Text - I Kings 3:3-14]

Pastor Dave Shackle
August 16, 2015

In this morning's Old Testament reading, a young man named Solomon is in the enviable position of being granted a wish. It's not because he finds a magic lamp; it's because he's just become king of Israel. So the Holy One of Israel appears to him in a dream and says, "What do you wish for me to give you?" Now unlike a genie who traditionally grants *three* wishes, the Holy One only gives Solomon one shot to get it right. I think he does a pretty good job - certainly better than I would have done. He doesn't ask for a long life, or great riches, or some ridiculously impossible pipedream like the Browns winning the Superbowl. What Solomon asks is for "an understanding mind" to govern the people of Israel - a truly noble request. However, looking back on how things turn-out, this may not have been the best request for Solomon to make.

According to the *First Book of Kings*, the Holy One does give Solomon a "wise and understanding mind". In fact, "the wisdom of Solomon" becomes a well-established expression, which is still used today. And Solomon does make some extremely clever and insightful judgments between quarreling parties who appear before his court. Apparently, he can wisely discern between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and evil; but unfortunately, in his own life, Solomon often doesn't follow the good, the true, or the right path.

Solomon imposes extremely heavy taxes on the people of Israel, in order to build and sustain his majestic palaces. And many of his poorer subjects who can't pay the tax are forced into slave-like labor in order to build these grand and glorious structures. Even though Solomon builds the great Temple in Jerusalem, he also builds numerous temples and shrines to house the gods and goddesses of his many foreign wives. And speaking of

wives, [for all those “Biblical Marriage” proponents out there] the Bible says that Solomon had 700 wives, as well as 300 concubines [or mistresses]. Even Brigham Young would admit that’s a bit over-the-top, and not particularly wise - especially considering that it means he also had 700 mothers-in- law!

So although Solomon is a highly intelligent and clever individual, when it comes to *relationships* - with his numerous wives, and children; with many of his subjects; and ultimately, with his Holy, Sustaining Source - Solomon is sorely lacking. A person can’t have multiple spouses and not expect jealousy or favoritism to arise, which they do. A king with numerous children from various spouses might also anticipate some really ugly and vicious fights when it comes to establishing a line of succession - which happens! Solomon’s spoiled and selfish sons end-up splitting the nation of Israel in two, through a bitter and bloody civil war. And Solomon’s attempt to please his foreign wives, and build international alliances - by venerating the various gods of their native lands - leads him to foolishly disregard the compassionate ways and wisdom of the Holy One.

In spite of his keen cleverness and tremendous wealth, Solomon becomes foolish and poor in regard to his relationships. He wishes for a wonderful thing - wisdom; but he fails to pursue the most important thing - a genuine and wholesome relationship with the Holy One. A relationship which will help him use that wisdom for the greater good. By accommodating many lessor gods; by seeking strength and security through complex political unions; and by trying to find fulfilment in his many marital and sexual unions, Solomon essentially spreads himself too thin. By constantly grasping for more power and wealth, influence and acclaim, Solomon loses his grip on what’s really important: faithful and lasting *relationships* with others, and with his Holy Source. Simply put, Solomon’s highly exalted wisdom isn’t translated into decent, down-to-earth actions.

In this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For *everyone* who asks receives...."

Wow! It seems as if Jesus is saying that you don't have to be a young king [or an old queen] in order to be a recipient of the "Heavenly Make a Wish Foundation"! His reasoning is, that if we far-from-perfect parents passionately desire to give good gifts to our children, then our Perfect Heavenly Parent will certainly give good things to those who ask! However, Jesus wisely ties this declaration to a critically important caveat: "In *everything* you do," Jesus say, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you!"

It's one thing to have great wisdom, but it's a completely different thing to live and act wisely. It might seem like a dream-come-true to have tremendous riches and power; but without good and wholesome relationships, riches and power can quickly become tarnished and toxic. It would be awesome to find a magical lamp and be granted three wishes. Yet it is far more awesome to realize that you and I have already been granted the one greatest gift of all: a Divine and everlasting Love which we can freely and fully share. A Love that, though not magical, multiplies magnificently each time that we put it to use.

In our Continuing Testament Ann Kroeker writes, "Wherever we are, in big ways and small, we are called to look to the interests of others - by treating, serving, and loving them, just as we'd like to be treated ourselves." Imagine for a moment, that you and I actually do this! That for one day, we make a conscious effort to treat our family, neighbors, strangers - even telemarketers and terrible drivers - with courtesy and compassion, empathy and respect. It could certainly be beneficial for them; and at the same time, it would be a fantastic blessing for us! There's a good chance that those people will feel moved to reciprocate, and treat *us* better - as well the other people they encounter throughout that day. And so the blessings would spread and flourish. And even though we may not end up changing the

world, changing ourselves - even for one day - can be an exceptionally worthwhile and wonderfully *wise* thing for us to do! I realize this may sound ridiculously optimistic; but hey, I am a life-long fan of a rather ridiculous football team. So what the heck, let's give it a try!