

F S HS

A Reflection

The Beginning of Wisdom

Readings: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

I don't know anyone who doesn't wish that they were wiser than they are.

Many of us have been in leadership positions. We know that it's not always easy being a leader.

You have to make decisions that others don't need to make. You may make decisions that are unpopular, because you are a leader, and 'not making a decision' is not an option.

In your leadership – whether it be leadership of a family, leadership of a group of people, or leadership of a business, there are times when you may have wanted to pray the prayer of King David: Psalm 61:2... “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I...”

Lead me to that place of clarity. Lead me to that place where I can get an over-view, a helicopter view, of all the factors that I need to take into account.

“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I...”

‘Lord, Make me wiser than I am’.

I often find myself going there as a church leader.

Before all our meetings as Elders, Managers, and Parish Councillors, we pray for wisdom to do make good decisions, for God's glory and the health and well-being of our parish and community.

Some decisions are easy to make, others are a bit more complicated.

It's no coincidence that many of the prophets, and leaders in the Bible, including Jesus himself, spent time alone on mountain tops, or by the seaside.

From those elevated, and peaceful places, they hoped to be able to see more clearly. To be wiser people. To make good decisions.

Our readings today focus on the theme of 'wisdom'.

Our first reading was the story of the death of king David and the succession of Solomon.

According to the Chronicler of 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 ‘Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David’ .

We know from our previous readings that David was not always the best example of faithfulness. He did not live by God's statutes. He was a flawed leader who often didn't have the wisdom needed to keep his family and his nation together. He was constantly at war.

But, as divine fate would have it, Solomon, the second son of Bathsheba emerged, above his older half-brothers, to become the new king of Israel and Judah.

There is the suggestion in the story, that Bathsheba plotted to make her son the front-runner in the royal succession. A kind justice for her ill-treatment by David, and revenge for the death of her first husband Uriah.

One of the first things Solomon did, was to get rid of his opposition - all under the watchful eye of his mother Bathsheba.

He even got rid of David's most trusted General, Joab, who was responsible for most of David's military victories. Solomon (or his mother) may have seen Joab as a threat. It was also Joab who had carried out David's order, to 'put Uriah (Bathsheba's husband) on the frontline', causing Uriah's death.

As the young Solomon considered the huge responsibilities of kingship, he felt his own inadequacy. In his prayer to God, he calls himself, 'a child' - someone who has a lot to learn. He shows the humility of one who is fit to rule others. He is not arrogant, or entitled.

As we heard in our reading, Solomon had a dream, in which God asked Solomon what gifts he wanted - to enable him to rule.

And as we heard, Solomon didn't ask for long life, riches, a larger army, or the defeat of his enemies.

He asked for the gift of 'wisdom'.

⁹Give 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?

God was pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom, and promised to give him wisdom such as the world has never seen before, plus the riches and honour he did not ask for.

Some might question just how wise Solomon was. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. How wise was that?

In worldly terms it was actually very wise. His wives represented the political ties with the surrounding nations and included a daughter of Pharaoh.

Solomon's most notable example of wisdom, was when two women claimed the same baby was theirs, and Solomon asked for a sword so that he could cut the baby in half. The real mother was willing to give up the baby to let it live.

This is perhaps one of the few stories in the David-Solomon narratives, where we see a glimmer of compassion – through the mother who was willing to deny herself in order to save her baby.

David's reign was marked by bloodshed.

Solomon's reign was marked by peace and prosperity and a growing bureaucracy, which gathered taxes from throughout his kingdom, making him fabulously rich.

He was able to build the First Temple in Jerusalem. His court was famous throughout the Middle Eastern region and as far as Africa. He expressed his wisdom in writing and poetry. The Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon are attributed to Solomon.

Interesting to note that Wisdom in Hebrew literature is symbolized as a feminine figure. She is even given the name, 'Sophia' in Greek 'Chokma' in Hebrew.

In Hebrew mythology, Chokma, or Sophia, is almost regarded as God's 'wife', or partner, who existed before anything was created. Wisdom and God work in partnership to bringing creation into being.

Proverbs 3:19 By wisdom the Lord founded the earth; by understanding he created the heavens. 20 By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the dew settles beneath the night sky.

Within the Book of Proverbs itself, Wisdom is depicted as a woman calling un-wise young men, to come away from harmful temptations like consorting with prostitutes. Wisdom beckons the unwise to follow her into a better life of shalom, and wholeness.

Contrasting with the feminine figure of Wisdom, are the masculine figures of the ancient gods of war. E.g. Mars, Roman god of war. Ares, Greek god of war. Both masculine.

Interesting that where we come across a 'goddess' of war, e.g. Greek goddess Athena, the female goddesses also tend to multi-task .

They have multiple roles, such as goddesses of wisdom, fertility, love, crafts, and water.

The ancient male gods of war tended to have only one role (one portfolio) as 'war god'.

War is the opposite of wisdom. The fighting begins, when wisdom has been abandoned.

This is certainly what we are seeing in the wars between Russia and the Ukraine and the war between Israel and Gaza. Wisdom has been abandoned and replaced by war.

In our second reading St Paul is giving instructions to a new Christian Community.

¹⁵Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. ... be filled with the Spirit,...

Wisdom is being in synch, or in tune with the Holy Spirit which always is peaceable and transformative.

Paul recommends that the Christian community should always be worshipping: *sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Worship is a transformative activity. As we pray and sing and worship, alone - and with others, we are changed and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

‘Worship!’, says Paul, ‘Keep your focus on the Lord, and it will change your life for the better. You will experience the wisdom and the shalom of God.

In our Psalm for today, Psalm 111:10, the Psalmist writes:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Fear here doesn't mean be in terror of God or be scared of God. It means ,‘reverencing’ God.

Reverencing God in all creation and in all of life.

Reverencing the God that is in yourself and in others.

When I first became a minister and saw my name written down on an order of service as, The ‘Reverend’ Wayne Toleafoa, it was like reading my name on a tombstone - a name that did not belong to me.

One day, while I was driving around my country parish, I felt a change come over me, which I can't explain, but I accepted that I was a minister, and a Reverend - one who must live, continuously reverencing God.

I began to own my title: Reverend. Someone who lives continuously in reverence for God.

It should be something we all do from the moment we wake up, to the moment we sleep.

Who knows, like Solomon in his dream, we might receive the gift of wisdom.

Finally, we see the wisdom of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Bread of Heaven.

The ultimate and radical wisdom of God is expressed most clearly in the love of God. Not just a mental exercise. Or adopting a new philosophy. In the death of Christ, we see the radical wisdom of God. To love, is to practise the wisdom of God. To love - one of the hardest things we may ever be called to do.

PRAYER:

Let us pray (in silence) that we may love God in all things and above all things.

Pause

O God,
you have prepared for those who love you
good things which no eye can see,
and which surpass our understanding;
pour into our hearts such longing for you,
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ
who is alive with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.