

## What should we pray for?

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1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

Today's passage from 1 Kings is a well-known story and part of the legend of Solomon and his wisdom. Many people think wow, what a wise and wonderful king Solomon must have been. Saying someone has the wisdom of Solomon is a real compliment. This means the person is not just wise, but fair and just as the story about the two women arguing over who is the mother of a child shows.. However if we really look at this passage and some of what was omitted a slightly different picture may begin to emerge. Now part of what brought this to mind was the Biblical Storytellers Festival Wendy and I attended just a couple of weeks ago.

The Solomon story was the source of some discussion at the Festival of Biblical Storytellers. Our epic telling this year was of the full story of King Solomon starting with today's passage and going until he died. Now the epic telling is when a group of storytellers like myself get together and for 1-2 hours we tell an entire book or major portions of a book for those in attendance. Solomon's story took almost a full two hours to tell. Some in the group were upset that the story of this king was the central focus of the event.

What was the issue you might ask? Solomon as he is portrayed in this passage seems to be a wonderful and wise king. The wisdom of Solomon means great wisdom and justice especially as shown in the story of the two women arguing over whose baby was the one who had survived. However if we really look at this passage and what was omitted a slightly different picture may begin to emerge.

So what else do you know about Solomon? *Ask for responses from congregation*

Here is what is missing. David is dead and Solomon is now king. If you look at the bulletin you will note that there is a jump in the reading. We start with 1Kings 2:10-12 and then skip to 1 Kings 3:3. In between are 30 some verses that have been left out. Now what is in those verses? Well, it is a pretty classic story of a new king wiping out all opposition including his chief rival who happens to be half brother. Solomon's visit to a high place to talk with God comes after a brutal military and political campaign that secures his rule by killing all of his rivals.

Are you feeling a little less than awed by what a wonderful person Solomon is at this point? Are you maybe wondering what is going on? Wait it gets even better or worse as the case may be.

Then he goes to a high place and it is not Jerusalem where the ark is and where eventually he will build his temple. This high place is one that after the building of the

temple another king will destroy because of the focus on the temple cult and that other gods were worshipped at this high place. Solomon's choosing to go to this high place is never explained. That he goes to a high place makes an offering and then sleeps up there is a clear indication that he is seeking guidance from God. Solomon the wise is also the king who has already married an Egyptian princess brought her to Jerusalem and allows her to worship her gods in Jerusalem. So what is going on here?

The debate at the Storytellers Festival is why did the leadership use Solomon's story for the epic telling. Given his whole story it is one of power, murder, political intrigue and in reality Solomon was not that nice a guy! Yet it is a very important story in the history of Judaism and does establish Jerusalem as the site of the First Temple. Eventually the Second Temple is built on the same spot and that is the one that Jesus would have known. It is part of our history and tradition and deserves to be read and examined in all of its beauty and ugliness.

The key is that this reading as is true of most of the Hebrew Scriptures is in reality more about God than it is about Solomon. I say this because the story of Solomon, as we have it in the Hebrew Scriptures, was probably written by the D writer or the Deuteronomist. This means it was not put into the form we see today until 500 years after Solomon's reign. Scholars know this because of the style and grammar that is used. It does not match the earlier writers. What are the D writers focused on? Defining Judaism during the time of the Babylonian Captivity. Establishing the law the Torah, that became the basis of Jewish teaching and identity. This is when most of the laws of the Torah were actually written and it focuses on defining Judaism and their unique place in the world. So all of this story must be viewed through this lens.

Scholars agree that this is also more about prayer than power. This is a case of God once again using a flawed human to work for the good of the people whom God has created. The dream of Solomon is held up as an example of good prayer and it is upon that we should focus.

Margaret Gunther, one of the leading teachers of Spiritual Direction and prayer in America, writes that prayer must be a conversation with God. Her most profound point is that God always speaks first. Notice that this is what happens in our reading. God speaks to Solomon first; God begins the conversation. We respond and our prayers can be as simple as saying yes God I am aware that someone needs help. God does not need us to tell God that so and so is sick or that they need to find a job or whatever is going on. God already knows, but our prayers can and should be a way to acknowledge that we are aware of the need or concern. That also implies a call to action as well.

We so often forget that prayer is so much bigger. But then we still have the problem that in prayers of petition and intercession, just what do we ask for? Solomon does not ask for things, but for guidance and wisdom. That should be big clue for us. I use a collect at the end of the prayers of the people that sums up this idea.

Heavenly Father, you have promised to hear what we ask in

the Name of your Son: Accept and fulfill our petitions, we pray, not as we ask in our ignorance, nor as we deserve in our sinfulness, but as you know and love us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The underlying theology behind this is that God knows what we need and Jesus assures us that this will be granted. However the challenge is that sometimes we may not know what we need.

Most of the time we use way too many words in our prayers. Our mind gets bound up with searching for the right words when in reality God really wants us to listen more than talk. That is why often when I'm praying with somebody especially if I'm laying on hands in healing prayer what I really want to do is just be silent and be the conduit for the Spirit. However some may think that I'm not doing anything, but in reality I am saying something simple and listening.

That prayer can be as simple as "Jesus heal me, Jesus help me." These are both simple prayers and it doesn't say what the help should be, just help me. Try that some night when you have that wake up at 3:00 a.m. and your brain starts to work and worry. Just repeat, Jesus help me and fall asleep in the knowledge that Jesus will help you. It really does work!

I haven't even touched on the concept of contemplation or meditation, praying the rosary are other types of prayer and one that may be more helpful because it is all about being present and listening, you do not bother with words. That however is not a sermon topic but a workshop or retreat subject. However if you want to find out more, come some Tuesday night at 7:30 in the chapel for Centering Prayer or talk to Jeremy Stowell, John Hamilton or any of a number of folks who take part in this. I'm of course happy to tell you more if you want to meet with me.

Prayer is important. We are called to pray everyday in a variety of ways. We all can pray for God to touch our lives in a deep and meaningful way. It is more about our attitude, than the words we say. As Samuel was told to say, "Speak Lord for your servant is listening."