

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; John 6:51-58

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

The king is dead; long live the king. Ok, so scripture doesn't really say that, but that's a close proximity to the way our first lesson begins.

Solomon is before the Lord God Almighty, and he's asked how he would like to be blessed. Solomon answers that he would like wisdom in order to govern the people of God. "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?" 1 King 3:9

What causes me to have an ironic smile is the way that the Lord God responds: "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." 1 King 3:11-12a. The reason for my ironic smile is because Solomon had already killed all of his enemies.

But we have to back up a couple of chapters. David is old. He's old, he has poor blood circulation, and he can't get warm. He can't warm, in part, because he's old, because he's lived a hard life, because his body is just pretty much worn out. He spent years on the run from King Saul. He's lived very much a warrior's life. To warm him up, his people say to each other: "Let's find a young girl for him, a young woman. We'll bring her to him and we'll let her wait upon the king and be his attendant, and we'll let her lie in his bosom so that she might keep the king warm."

So they do this. They find a beautiful girl by the name of Abishag. She's a Shunamite. (That's not all that important.) They bring her to the king and she becomes the king's attendant and she serves him, but – and it's a very important but – the scripture says, "The king did not know her sexually."

Now, had Abishag been able to "warm him up" and get pregnant then David would still be a viable king. But since she does not get preggers, that implies that David is old, impotent, and therefore unfit to serve as king. "Ah ha!" Says the oldest surviving son Adonijah. "This is the time for me to make my move." Because Adonijah is – at least in his own mind – the leading contender for the throne.

Adonijah gathers a bunch of supporters together, and invites all of the king's sons (except Solomon). Also, General Joab and the priest Abiathar – both of whom had supported David when Absalom, as the oldest living son, had his momentary flash, as I talked about last week – are invited to this big shin-dig. But David's old and dying, and Joab and Abiathar think

They see the writing on the wall that Adonijah is going to be the next king. So they are all there and everybody begins to proclaim "Hail King Adonijah."

Nathan the prophet (the guy who confronted David about his affair with Uriah's wife Bathsheba) hears of the big party Adonijah is throwing for his own coronation; the party to which Nathan is very conspicuously not invited. Nathan goes and says this really interesting thing to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother: "Have you not heard that Adonijah son of Haggith has become king and our lord David does not know it?" So he asks Bathsheba to go talk to her husband the King, and to remind her husband the king of his apparent promise to her that Solomon would gain the throne upon David's death. Remember that it's usually the oldest surviving son who takes the throne, and in this case that's not Solomon. Adonijah is the oldest surviving son, because their brother Absalom killed Amnon who was the oldest son, and then Absalom was executed by Joab when he tried to usurp the throne. You don't need to remember all those names. They were knocking each other off, one by one.

So David tells them to get the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaniah along with the Cherethites and the Pelethites (some local supporters of David). They put Solomon on the king's steed and they go up to the high place outside of Jerusalem and there the priest Zadok anoints Solomon as king. They blow the trumpet, and all the people say, "Hail, Solomon, king!" This is very reminiscent of the way that David himself was first anointed by the prophet Samuel way back in 1 Samuel 16, when Samuel went and found David and anointed him when Saul was still king, because God was ticked off at Saul.

Adonijah and crew, while they are in the midst of their celebrations, hear about Solomon having been anointed by the prophet Nathan and they pretty much go "oh, _____" (fill in your own expletive), and they all leave the party as quickly as possible. Adonijah is so afraid, he runs to the temple and grabs hold of the altar (which is the biblical way of asking for sanctuary – asking for mercy). Solomon sends word to Adonijah that so long as he behaves himself, he has nothing to worry about.

So, David dies. We knew this was going to happen; it's no big shocker. Before he quits breathing, he gives Solomon some advice concerning certain people. Among others, he tells Solomon that General Joab can no longer be trusted. So David dies, the nation mourns, and Adonijah makes another move for the throne. This time he goes to Bathsheba, now mother to the king, held in nearly equal esteem as the king himself. Adonijah asks Bathsheba to ask King Solomon on his behalf if he – Adonijah – might take as his wife the young woman Abishag. Remember that's the girl that they gave to King David to try to warm him up. Subterfuge alert right here! What Adonijah is trying to do is pull a fast one on his kid brother, because by taking the former king's latest – and newest – woman, and getting her pregnant, he will show the nation that he is able to do what the former king could not do, and, apparently, what the current king is not willing to do.

I get the feeling that Adonijah is not the brightest grape in the bunch because he overlooks the fact that Bathsheba is not stupid and can figure things out on her own. Bathsheba does

do as he asks. She goes to her son Solomon and says, "Would you do this for your brother Adonijah? He would like your father's former concubine."

Well, Solomon reacts exactly like anyone with political savvy, anyone with a little bit of intelligence would. He sees right through Adonijah's veiled grasp for the throne. He sends Benaniah to dispatch Adonijah – end of older brother.

So then, on to the rest of them. He banishes the high priest Abiathar, who had supported Adonijah. When General Joab hears about the death of Adonijah, he runs to the temple to ask for sanctuary, but Solomon is having none of that, and he sends Benaniah (who is now his general) to take care of the Joab problem – end of duplicitous general. Solomon puts some very strong restrictions on another fellow who was an enemy of David (and eventually has this fellow executed for disobeying the terms of his house arrest).

Now, on a positive note, one of the things that Solomon does is to make a peace treaty with Egypt by marrying one of the Pharaoh's daughters. That all has goes down up until the point that Solomon is now in this high place, making his sacrifices to the Lord God Almighty and he gets this great invitation.

I have to say Solomon on his own has been a pretty smart guy. He knows how to handle his enemies. He knows how to treat people with respect to accomplish his goals. That's how he was able to get Nathan and Benaniah and Zadok the priest to help him out. He seems to have a pretty good grasp on the concepts of good vs. evil. Still, when he's asked by the Lord God he responds with this great line.

“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?”

To which the Lord God responds:

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.”

Wow. Not bad for a guy who has just whacked all his rivals. He's eliminated a few enemies and made a peace deal with their ancient antagonist. But may I also say – again – this family has more intrigue than I can ever imagine happening in the greater Brock ancestry tree.

There have been times when I have met folks who, while in the midst of conversation, I realize that despite the fact that they are trying to show me how much they know about scripture, I realize they really haven't read the Bible. They tell me that scripture brings them peace. That they turn to scripture for inspiration. That they look to the Bible as a model for how to live. Now, you can find those things in scripture. But if that's the only way that you see scripture, I think you haven't really read all of what's going on. I say that because if you look at everything that happened before our reading tonight – all the stuff that happens from when Solomon assumes the

throne up until he's blessed by the Lord God Almighty, we can see how much violence, how much intrigue, how much back-stabbing is happening.

I will say this about Solomon: Most of the rest of his reign is filled with wisdom and compassion and understanding. And I have to say that most, no, probably all of us here, have done something of which we are not proud. Something that we regret. Maybe it was breaking mom's favorite flower vase and blaming it on the cat, or not getting that report in on time and claiming harddrive failure, or being rude to the checkout clerk when I'm in a bad mood. Or maybe something even meaner than any of those examples. Maybe something that you're too ashamed or embarrassed to admit, even to yourself. Yet even with that great big fault hanging over our heads, the good news is, the great news is, that God loves us and wants us to tell others about this love.

I do want to cut Solomon a little bit of slack here, because when God does ask him this huge, open-ended question, "Ask what I should give you," how would I have responded? Would I been like Solomon and asked for wisdom and understanding? Would I have asked for discernment of good and evil? Or would I have asked for something a little bit more, shall we say, closer to home? Like say, maybe, God could you eliminate my debt, or fix up my house so that it's insulated, please. Or better yet, Lord, would you give me a salary so that I can pay other people to go do these things for me? I'm not so sure that I would have asked for wisdom and understanding.

The thing is, I do think that God does ask us that question each and every day. "What is it that I can do for you?" And the way that we answer that question is how we live each and every day. Do I live seeking wisdom, striving for understanding, discerning the difference between good and evil? Or do I live each day for myself, with maybe a little bit for God, and not a whole lot for anybody else? How is it that I live my days? How is it that you live yours?

Amen.