

**A Heart Divided August 15, 2021**  
**Based on 1 Kings 2:10-12. 3:3-14 and Proverbs 9: 1-6**

I would like to begin this morning by asking you a question: if a genie in a bottle showed up in your house offering you three wishes what would you ask for?

Some of us might immediately be drawn into the practical needs: a new car, a way to pay off a mortgage or a job. Some of us might ask for adventure, travel, and leisure. There are also needs that weigh heavily upon us - healing for ourselves or a loved one, help for a child or grandchild who has made some wrong turns perhaps due to addiction or peer pressure. There might be a temptation for fame, prestige, and promotion. Or there might even be the spiritual answers: to know that God has answered a prayer that means so much to us. Perhaps even a prayer about a loved one turning to God when they have gotten lost and confused on their journey. And finally there are the global wishes: wishes for an end to world hunger, an end to injustice, illiteracy, or oppression.

None of these wishes are wrong in and of themselves. Sure, some of them might be considered more pious than others and some might appear to be more self-seeking or vain, but in the end of the day, even the apparently superficial wishes usually come from a place of deep desire - a desire to feel secure, valued, and acknowledged. There are perhaps some people in this world who only look after “number one,” but what I have experienced over the years in my various ministry placements is that most people at their core are inherently good. Sometimes the good is clouded over by grief, trauma, and a hard exterior, but most people truly do want to help and be supportive of others they meet.

Solomon was one such man. When God appeared to him as a young man he was offered anything that he could think of. There were no stipulations to God’s rules. No price limit, time limit, or speed limit. In short: Solomon was free to ask whatever he wanted. And Solomon chose well. He didn’t ask God for too much or something that would only benefit himself, rather he asked for something long-lasting and enduring, something that would truly make him a great king. He asked for wisdom, and the Bible says that God was pleased with his request, not only granting it but also giving Solomon all the things he didn’t ask for (good health, wealth, honour, a good reputation, and a long-life). I am sure that these are things that all of us here would wish to have, and so it seems at first that Solomon has it made and that the young king has arrived. Sadly, we will see later on in the story that isn’t necessarily so and that what something looks like on the outside can be strangely deceptive to what is really happening on the inside.

Wisdom has been something which all cultures and religions have sought after throughout history. Whether we talk about the Dali Lama of Buddhism, the Pope in Roman Catholicism, the Sheikhs of the Muslim community, or the Knowledge-Keepers and Elders within the Indigenous communities, human kind has always searched for leaders who could provide insight and sound teachings. A trip to the library or even a quick google search will reveal a myriad of proverbs and wise sayings not just from the Bible but also passed down through word of mouth from

even the remotest tribes in the world. Grandparents have shared stories with their young grandchildren of admonition to help them learn morals and values, and many people have invested time and money into seeing wise counselors, life coaches and spiritual directors whom they consider to be wise.

The search for wisdom is nothing new, but the asking of it in Solomon's case was novel. In fact, it was in the search for wisdom itself that Adam and Eve made a very unwise decision. Rather than simply asking for it directly the way Solomon did, they trusted the serpent who promised them that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that their eyes would be opened and they would be like God. So Adam and Eve ate without any further thought to the matter. We all know what happened after the fact - it resulted in pain, suffering, and death. The search for wisdom has been placed in all of our hearts, but yet the lengths and methods we use to acquire that wisdom are what truly can determine the state of our souls.

We live in an age of information overload. The last 20 years or so have afforded us the opportunity to simply speak into our phones or smart speakers while the answers come to us immediately. We no longer have to do the hard work of research, instead we can simply type something into Google and within seconds a result will be sent to us. We can post a question on Facebook and probably will receive a relatively wise answer from one of our friends who works in the field and can connect us to the right sources. Zoom calls allow us to connect to all sorts of master classes from various experts around the world, and during the Pandemic opportunities for free studies at major universities were offered to help curb the boredom. Yet, knowledge itself does not necessarily equate with wisdom. I'm sure we all know someone who is very intelligent and has multiple degrees yet constantly make bad choices in their own lives. We also all know people who have little or no formal education and yet are extremely wise and have amazing street smarts. So while if anyone advocates for education and the academy it would be me, I also recognize that it does have its limits.

Wisdom on the other hand is something completely different. The words wisdom and wise are mentioned over 500 times in the Bible with promises given to those who seek after it and warnings given to those who don't. Wisdom is attributed to the ways we act and conduct ourselves, to our emotional and spiritual maturity, and to our understanding and ability to recognize justice and it primarily comes from a heart that is ready to listen to God. It is not simply the pursuit of wisdom that God devotes time to in Scripture though, but also the best ways to use it. We are taught to be wise as serpents but innocent as doves and we are instructed to use our gift wisely. Thus wisdom is not a gift given to be taken advantage of and abused, but rather a gift given to help other people. Think about the wisest teachers, ministers, and mentors that you have met in your life. They might have been incredibly wise people, but had they chosen to keep their wisdom to themselves and not to have shared it with you then their wisdom would have been in vain and pointless. Wisdom is given so that we might instruct the next generation and help them as they blaze their own path.

What we know from Solomon's reign is that while his initial request for wisdom was good and pleasing to God, it was incredibly short-lived and his reign both began and

ended with apostasy (the renunciation of his beliefs). The Bible gives us clues as to why this might have been. Firstly, we know that Solomon always lived his life on the edge and was never fully in. He still relied heavily on his father David's faith to help him get by rather than making a commitment to God for himself. He also did not do everything that he knew he was instructed to.

The Bible says that Solomon had the right heart AT FIRST, but then he soon found other things to preoccupy his time and attention. He also left the temples of his wives open when he was explicitly told to tear them down. He did this because he was more concerned with his political alliances than with his faith. The Bible tells us that a "house divided cannot stand" and it definitely didn't in Solomon's case. We cannot serve two masters - we cannot serve the ways of this world and the ways of Christ. We cannot commit to ending injustice while also participating in unjust activities. We cannot preach of a world of peace, harmony and good-will if we engage in attitudes which promote just the opposite.

This reminds me of my favourite slogan or rule of life that I personally live by "half-measures avail us nothing." In other words: you're either in or you're out, you're either hot or you're cold. Solomon was simply mild and lukewarm in his faith preferring to please people over pleasing God. Towards the end of his reign he also made his constituents' lives unbearable. He placed heavy burdens on them and made them work hard in a way that ultimately left his workers unhappy with him and displeased. No one likes to feel taken advantaged of or used, and unfortunately, Solomon's wisdom did not extend into the way he saw anyone other than himself. In the end of the day he still saw himself as number one. Solomon's wisdom soon gave way to pride, then arrogance, and lastly forgetfulness as he ceased to remember who he was and where he came from.

We all have many decisions to make every day and many of these decisions require us to use wisdom. When we were children, we had to choose to make good choices such as looking both ways when crossing a street, not eating too many cookies before dinner, and not talking to strangers. When we get older, these life choices become much more complex. Who will I marry? Which university will I choose to attend? What will my profession be? Where will I live? How will I invest my finances, and so on. We then make choices which only we can decide for ourselves - which faith or religion will I take part in? Will I choose to remain part of the church or to leave? Will I choose to spend or to save? Who will I spend my time with and give my energy to? Will I choose to make physical and mental health a priority and if so what does that look like for me? Perhaps you never thought about applying wisdom to these situations, but the truth is that for any choice we do make there will be consequences - either positive or negative. Sometimes in our adult lives we may need to exercise boundaries, we might gain or lose friends as a result of our choices and viewpoints, we might gain or lose respect or prestige in our family or jobs, we might gain or lose our peace of mind based on the choices we ultimately decide on.

Part of wisdom is about recognizing what we are responsible for and what we're not. We are only ever responsible for our own selves - our own emotions, responses, reactions, and beliefs, and we cannot expect others to be responsible on our behalf.

This is why the serenity prayer has gained lots of traction over the years. I'm sure many of us know it. The short version goes like this "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Real wisdom brings us peace of mind, peace with others and peace with God. Real wisdom is fine with being vulnerable, admitting that we don't know it all, and asking for help. Real wisdom is seeking out those who we believe can help us in our circumstances and following their advice.

When I think of wisdom, I think of my own journey to ordination with the United Church of Canada. The process I am undertaking is all about discernment. It is all about soul-searching, sharing my life map with others, and looking for God signs along my journey. It is about accepting both feedback and encouragement. It is ultimately about trusting those who are wiser than I am to lead and guide me in the right direction. Sometimes the process towards gaining wisdom can be difficult and stressful. Sometimes self-awareness and deeply probing into one's own life can be exhausting, but in the end, it is worth it. It leads me to a greater sense of how I can best support others. It reminds me that life is more than just my own little world and it ultimately helps me to get out of self.

As we close our reflection this morning I want to share a short story I read about wisdom from an unknown author: A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime.

But, a few days later, he came back to return the stone to the wise woman.

"I've been thinking," he said. "I know how valuable this stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me this stone."

Sometimes it's not the wealth you have but, what's inside you that others need.

I pray that this week God will join us on our own quest towards wisdom. That God will enlighten and enliven our hearts. That God will speak to us and direct us as we search out how to be more Christlike. And ultimately I pray that we will use the gifts of wisdom we have been granted to be of maximum benefit to our brothers and sisters as we also encourage and guide them on their own journey. May it be so. Amen.