

“Becoming Wise Beyond Your Years”

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First Presbyterian Church
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New Testament Lesson: John 14:11-14

Old Testament Lesson: 1 Kings 3:5-13

“At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream.” Solomon had an encounter with the divine. “The point of (a) divine encounter,” said Peter Gomes, who served as professor of Christian Morals at Harvard Divinity School, “is never that we should become divine ourselves, (like) little gods; that was the problem in Eden. No, “the point and achievement of the divine encounter,” said Gomes, “... is that (we) become fully human, that is, that we become more fully what we are meant to be....”¹

That’s what today’s sermon is about – us, you and me – becoming more fully the person who God intends us to be. Solomon was just a boy when he became king of Israel. One night, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, “Ask what I should give you.” Wouldn’t that be great – having God come to you in a dream asking what you would like God to give you?!? Well, I’ve got Good News for you – God is asking you that very question – “what should I give you, Jim,” says God; Don, Marilyn, Helen, Bob, Betty, Judy, Bob, or Dave ... -- “what should I give you?”

God asks us this in his act of sending Jesus Christ for us and for our salvation, Jesus who says in our New Testament reading we heard today, “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

Ask for anything in Christ’s name and it shall be done. That’s not exactly what Solomon was told by God, but Solomon was wise enough to know it – to know that what we get in life has a lot to do – really everything to do – with our relationship to God, which for us, comes through Jesus Christ. It matters how we relate to God, to ourselves, and how we relate to other people.

1st Kings tells us, “It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked (for wisdom). 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, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind.... I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life....”

How did Solomon know what to ask for in order to live a good life and enjoy the blessings that come from this?

¹ Peter Gomes, in a Pentecost sermon, cited by Eugene C. McAfee in *The Place Belongs to God* (Cambridge: Harvard College, 1995), 69.

It's kind of an important question for anyone wanting to live a good life full of blessings.

The first thing Solomon did was look to God. Solomon was struggling to understand himself and his place in life, and he looked to God, saying, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you."

Solomon looks for God's hand upon those who had gone before him – those who had lived a good life and received the blessings of the Lord. Looking at his father, King David, Solomon sees how central God was to his life and wants to have that in his life, as well.

The first step in living a good and blessed life is to look at how God is working in the lives of those whom we admire, those who are true to God. This could be a friend or family member, a neighbor or coworker, a teacher or parent. It's worth opening up to such a person, to get his or her perspective on how you're doing in life.

The second thing Solomon did was take a good look at himself. He looked at where God had led him so far, saying, "... You have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in."

Solomon is the king of Israel. Anything he wants is at his command – he can eat whatever food he wants, work as much or as little as he wants, have all the entertainment he wants, go anywhere he wants.

But Solomon knows his limits. He knows that whatever he is on the outside, on the inside he's still a child in the sight of God, still in need of direction in life. Well, that's true for all of us. No matter how much or how little power anyone has, no matter how rich or how poor, how young or how old, we still need direction in life.

Most of us can eat whatever we want, to some extent; work as hard or as lazily as we want, to some extent; spend more or less time in front of the TV, at the computer, or on your Smartphone or Tablet; and come and go as we please. To some extent, we've all been given the freedom to make our own lot in life. So the next step in living a good and blessed life is to take a good look at yourself; the choices we make.

How we fare in this world has more to do with the choices we make than with the limitations we face. I mean, wisdom is not hard to come by, it's just hard to act on. We have to continually grow and mature in our faith.

I think it's summed up in the following bit of wisdom that can be found, of all places, on a bumper sticker – it's something having to do with our desire to live forever and the wisdom to know better:

It says, “We don’t need a Fountain of Youth. We have enough youth, what we need is a fountain of SMART?” I don’t think that refers to youth as in young people, but more like thinking too small.

What this points to is the fact that God is, indeed, faithful in providing us choices that will lead us to a better life and greater blessings. It’s just that often, we choose poorly, we think too small when it comes to ourselves, other people, and even God.

We don’t see the blessings waiting for us just around the next corner. That’s what faith is all about – doing right just because it’s the right thing to do, and having faith that God will provide. Solomon showed great faith in God and he showed great faith in himself. Solomon displayed the gift of wisdom before he even asked for it, coming before God in humility, taking stock of his life, and asking God to equip him for what was next.

We could do that more often, couldn’t we? Ask God to equip us for what’s next. I don’t know what challenge lies before you, but I do know that God is ready to guide and equip you to succeed. All we have to do is take the next right step, trusting in God to meet us around the next corner. Solomon shows us that another right step in life is always to think first of the people God has put in our lives, the people who are counting on you.

The third step to a better life in the sight of God is to put our gifts to use for the benefit of others. What is your special God-given gift? Do you have the gift of hospitality, making others feel wanted and needed? Perhaps you’re good with numbers, helping to figure out how things add up. Or maybe you have an artistic talent, bringing beauty into the world for others to enjoy and appreciate.

Whatever your gifts and talents are, God is ready to put them to use for the betterment of this world we live in. God is ready to add blessings to your life and the lives of others, even the hidden blessings that – because we don’t see them at first – keep us from taking that leap of faith.

So that’s the challenge before us today – to have enough confidence in God to step out in faith, and thus to open ourselves up to enjoying the hidden blessings that come from a life of faith, blessings available to us all when we, take the time out of our day to look to God, and then take a good look at ourselves, and ask God how God would use us to make this a better world for all people. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, your way of working in our world is often beyond our ability to comprehend. You continually surprise us by loving the unlovable, choosing the outcast, and forgiving the most egregious sinner among us.

Your kingdom is a place where the first are last, the youngest gets picked ahead of the eldest, and children are held up as role models.

You specialize in the impossible – impossible people, impossible tasks, impossible situations.

The truth is, Lord, we just don't "get it." We don't get your timeline, and we don't get your methods.

Yet, we are grateful that you can and do redeem what seems beyond repair to us. You transform what seems hopeless. You bring life out of death.

Thank you for all that you do for us in Jesus Christ, your gift to the world, your Son our Saviour, who taught us to pray together saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive
our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**