

January 3, 2009
Second Sunday After Christmas

“Our Proper Place”

1 Kings 3:4-15

As we celebrated the arrival of 2010 this past week, what is it that you wished for in the coming year? Health? Wealth? Romance? A Saints Superbowl victory? There are probably as many answers to that question as we have people here today.

How many asked for wisdom? Probably not a lot. Wisdom really doesn't seem to have a high value attached to it in our society these days. In fact, in a whole lot of ways people seem to be sacrificing wisdom in favor of something that doesn't seem all that wise of a thing to attain: celebrity.

I mean think about it. How smart is it to invite all of American to come into your house and watch you on television? As if life isn't stressful enough as it is. But it seems that all sorts of folks would like nothing better than to be their own reality TV show. And then those who actually get such a show are shocked when their family life implodes on the air. Well, duh.

Why is it that people who have absolutely no discernable musical talent insist on going on shows like America's Got Talent? How is it wise or desirable to become a celebrity because of the horribleness of your singing or dancing? Yet people aspire to exactly that—I guess because being an awful celebrity is better than being unridiculed but unknown.

I can't even comprehend what drive for notoriety could possibly make someone think that faking their kid being trapped in a weather balloon was a wise course to plot toward fame and fortune.

There are tons of folks promoting themselves on facebook or youtube on the internet, hoping their video or blog or picture or whatever will be the next big thing to go viral and be seen by millions. We seem to be a nation increasingly obsessed with self promotion. There seems to be this “It's all about me” attitude. “Me, me, me. I've got to get people to notice me.”

Why is this? I think a lot of it goes back to Genesis Three and the temptation in the garden. Eve ate after Satan told her the fruit would make her like a god. One of the core roots of sin is that we don't want to be subjects of God. We want to raise ourselves up in his place. A modern offshoot of this desire may just be this crazy self aggrandizing obsession.

But anybody going off in this direction should ask themselves, “Is that wise? I mean, have you really looked at yourself lately?”

Celebrities or not, we all have an image of ourselves that we would like others to see. But we know the truer self. We know the sinful thoughts, words or deeds that would horrify us if they were made public. Often celebrities get that truer image revealed with disastrous results. Perhaps we would all be better off if we remembered who we are in the grand scheme of things instead of believing our own press.

Proverbs 9:10 reads, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”*

Perhaps one of the things we should aspire to this coming year should not be a focus on us, but a focus on God and the wisdom that comes from realizing and remembering our place as His children.

Solomon was the celebrity of the day in Israel. He was the new young king of a powerful nation that had subdued all of its enemies. He had every reason in the world to think that He was something special, to think that “It's all about me.”

Yet in today's reading we have Solomon being anything but self aggrandizing. Instead he is being wise, even before receiving God's gift of wisdom. First we have the new King Solomon make a thousand sacrifices to God. Why does he do this? Well, one of the big reasons, maybe *the* biggest reason people made sacrifices to Yahweh was in order to cover their sins. It would seem one of Solomon's first acts as king was to repent of his sins before God. He is not full of himself. He knows he is full of flaws, wrongs and rebellions and seeks God's forgiveness.

God's response is more than just forgiveness. God says in a dream, "Ask what I shall give you." Solomon could have asked for all sorts of stuff for himself; more riches, power and glory. But Solomon doesn't react that way. He seems to react in a way that reflects His place before God. He is the king God has set over God's people Israel.

He reacts with praise and prayer. He speaks of what God did for his father King David and says, "*And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.*" Solomon recognizes that he is king only because God has put him there. And even though Solomon is now king, he remains humble before God, describing himself as being a servant and even "but a little child."

And Solomon further recognizes that what is going on is the fulfilling of God's promises for Israel. He knows that his life is not about Solomon, it is about God's plan unfolding in the world, and he make his request to God based a desire to do God's will for God's purposes. "*And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?*"

In governing our own lives, perhaps we should take the lead from Solomon. Instead of looking to ourselves first and what we can do to make ourselves grander in the eyes of the world, let us recognize where we stand in relation to God and His promises and His plan. Let us fear the Lord and recognize that we do not measure up to His will for our lives. Let us remember His holy one, Jesus Christ, the only one in whom we are saved and continually go to God in prayer and repentance to receive the forgiveness promised through Jesus' blood. To do this is wisdom, and doing so will keep us humbled and remembering where we stand before God; that we are His beloved children being saved according to His plan.

And know what being saved by God is like. Solomon asked for an understanding mind to govern and to know good from evil. But God gives him "*a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days.*" God blesses Solomon abundantly, even more that the young king hopes.

God is the same way with all who humble come before Him in repentance. We seek forgiveness of sins. God gives us the kingdom of heaven! The wise person recognizes what is very simple; God is God, we are not. God is loving and forgiving and longs to shower wonderful gifts on His children. The unwise person wants to step outside of God's plan and seek other blessings—to proudly promote themselves to a kingship of things that are dying rather than to humbly receive the greater gifts that are eternal. The unwise rebel, trust in themselves alone and do not fear the Lord or remember what His holy one has done for them. They seek to be the celebrity and put God in second, third or last place. The wise fear God while knowing that His nature is to love us enough to send His Son Jesus to die for us. The wise know their place as a little child before God and gladly and thankfully receive their Father's gifts.

Does this mean celebrity is evil? No. Doing the things God gives you to do in your life well and to God's glory may bring big and public benefits. Solomon ruled well and became a world-renowned king of his day. Drew Brees plays good football and gets recognized for it with commercials and appearances. I try to preach good sermons and folks keep asking me over to their house to eat. Good stuff happens. Recognition and celebrity may come. But in spite of it all, the wise always remember where they stand; before the Lord their God's throne. The wise fear and love God and bow in His presence because of His power and because of His goodness.

Resolve to be wise. Be wise and repent. Be wise and pray. Be wise and be humble before God, knowing that His plan for you is best. Do all things to His glory and prosper as you will. But remember that even should you become king, you are still a little child of your heavenly Father. Be a wise child who desires nothing more and knows that there is nothing better than to be held in Daddy's arms.