

Homily for August 19, 2018

The theme this week is wisdom. According to Webster's wisdom can be insight, judgement or knowledge. As we read, in a dream God appears to Solomon and promises him anything he wishes. Solomon asked for wisdom – understanding and discernment. He wanted to know how to be a good ruler to his people and to govern with their needs in mind. God was happy with his response and that he did not ask for personal riches, long life or death to his enemies, so He granted his request.

This concept of people being given choices appears several times in the bible. In the book of Esther, King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) gives Queen Esther a request and said he would grant it. She asks that her people be saved from death at the hand of Haman. Her request is granted. A wise queen asking for the good of her people. We will hear this story in the lessons in about month.

Not all of these requests are wise. A few weeks ago, we heard Herod giving Salome her choice of anything she wants, and she opts for John the Baptist's head. An interesting mix of names Solomon and Salome...

I have known about Solomon for years, but never knew his background. He was the second son of David and Bathsheba. Their first son – the product of an adulterous relationship – dies due to the wrath of God. From an early age,

Solomon was a favorite of David as well as God. David anointed him to be his successor, but at David's death another son Adonijan tried to grab the throne. Solomon was forced to kill him as well as David's general Joab. Pleasant times to live.

Solomon had a long and fruitful reign of 40 years. He unified the kingdom and brought much wealth to it. For governing, he divided his kingdom into 12 divisions. Each division was assigned a month in which they had to support his kingship, so the burden was spread around and fell on all equally.

Wisdom. Oh, how I wish that the tax burden fell on all equally today!

There was a story of two women in one household, each with a new born child. One child died. Both women claimed the remaining child. To resolve the conflict, Solomon ordered that the baby be cut in half and each receive half. One mother screamed and withdrew her claim. Solomon gave her the child, as only a true mother would do anything to keep her child alive.

Wisdom.

Solomon's downfall was his lust. It is said that he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. (This seems to be a biblical exaggeration.) Among his wives was the daughter of the pharaoh of Egypt – a political union - and many other wives not of the Jewish faith. This angered God as the non-Jewish wives drew him away from the faith. At his death his kingdom was split, never to be

unified again. His son Rehoboam ruled part of the divided kingdom, but it never reached the height of those of David and Solomon.

Solomon was also a prolific writer and musician. It is said that he wrote most of the Book of Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, the Book of Ecclesiastes and at least two psalms. At my high school- in teen age hood – at a boarding school – we had nightly prayers with bible reading. The Song of Solomon was discovered and became a staple until word came down from above that it was taboo!

In the Epistle, Paul pleads for the people to live wisely, making the most of their lives and time. “Understand the word of the Lord and live by it.” If, only the politicians and leaders around the world today would show some wisdom and concern and rule for what is best for their people.

The wisdom in the Gospel arises to me in a different way. John’s gospel lesson has been broken up and covers three weeks. We will hear more next week. This week’s gospel, which we essentially sang last week as our communion hymn at 10:30, continues the theme, “eat the flesh of Jesus and drink of his blood.” As a youth not understanding the meaning, it seemed to me to be cannibalism!

Roman Catholics have as one of their basic beliefs that the bread and wine at

communion are really Christ's body and blood. They might look like bread and wine but are not; they are really Christ's body and blood. This is one of the bases of their faith. During the consecration bread and wine actually change form and become flesh and blood. This is called the process of Transubstantiation. Paul took Christ's words at the Last Supper literally and began pushing this as a belief around the year 57. The Council of Trent in 1551 reaffirmed the real presence of Christ in the communion. It was a must belief. Any non-believers were anathemas to the faith.

In the Reformation Martin Luther broke with this belief and declared that they were still bread and wine, but that Christ's flesh and blood were also physically present. This was called Consubstantiation – wow such big words!

At the last supper Christ was present in his living self. When he said this is my body and this is my blood he was not butchering himself. He was talking in metaphor. Christ used many metaphors in his teaching: "I am the vine; you are the branches," is one example. In the play "The Book of Mormon" a favorite line of mine is when one of the natives declared that religion is all metaphor. You know, it strikes me as a wise statement. Jesus instructed his disciples to partake of the Lord's supper in remembrance of him. He did not promise to be physically present at the rite.

In my opinion, wisdom enters through the Anglican Communion's view to the

symbolism of the Eucharist. Their approach has its roots in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and has been conveyed through the later versions of the Books of Common Prayer. All Anglican rites, such as Eucharist, Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Unction and others are described as “An outward and visible sign of an inward invisible grace.” “An outward and visible sign of an inward invisible grace.” In the Eucharist, the outward and visible sign is the bread and wine. The inward invisible grace received is the spirit of Christ and His promise of eternal life. The body and blood are conveyed spiritually to the believer who has faith. To someone receiving communion who does not possess faith they are getting bread and wine.

In its wisdom, the Anglican Church does not tell you what you have to believe, but, allows you to decide for yourself. If you wish to believe in Transubstantiation you may, consubstantiation, that’s OK too or neither, still OK. Anglicanism allows you to think and decide rather than dictate to you. As long as you believe in Christ, you will be receiving Christ’s spirit and renewal through the eucharist.

Amen

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