

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

August 16, 2009
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

¹⁰Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹²So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

^{3:3}Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.

⁴The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶And Solomon said, "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 toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O LORD my God, 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. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted.

⁹Give 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?" ¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God 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, ¹²I 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.

¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and

hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Fashion Wisdom”

“Fashion Wisdom”—I’m not sure that I know what that is—especially if you saw me this week. I did it more than one day. I wore short pants with black socks and shoes. I know it is a fashion no-no. I remember seeing a man do that years ago and I vowed I would never do something like that.

The reality of it is there are some tasks where my black shoes are more comfortable than my sneakers. I justified my fashion choice by saying to myself, “hey, I’m on vacation you can do this when you are on vacation.” I must tell you that I was not shy about going out in public that way or even being seen by the neighbors.

As long as I’m telling the fashion secrets of the week, I may as well also tell you that a few days this week I wore long pants and a long sleeve shirt. I know that we have seen some of the hottest temperatures of the summer this week, but I made the fashion choice on purpose. When I work out in the yard I prefer to keep myself covered up. I’m not only protecting my skin from the UV rays, but I’m convinced that a light colored long sleeved shirt is the right choice in the sun and keeps you cooler.

Maybe it is more of a fashion choice than it is about fashion wisdom.

Last week my niece’s sister-in-law made the choice to wear flip flops on the day that she was doing a walking tour of the mall and memorials in Washington, DC. That was not a wise decision. They were not at all the proper choice for footwear when one was going to be walking all day long. It was not fashion wise. It was a poor choice. The flip flops may have looked good with her summer outfit, but they were not conducive to miles of walking in one day.

Contrary to what People Magazine may tell us, it is not all about looking good. Looking good is not a bad thing; it is good, but it is not the end of all that is either. Our culture is obsessed with looks. Plastic surgeons drive very nice cars and have second homes in Miami.

While I think one needs to dress respectable and really should not wear black socks and shoes with short pants, I do not think fashion is really all that important. One should not dress offensively, but a pair of black shoes in the summertime—at the worst it is a good laugh.

Even simple choices like clothes do, on some level, have larger implications. We have these fashion norms, if I can call them that, in order to know how one is to be in public and in order to be acceptable to each other. There was a time when a man would not consider going to church without a coat and tie. In the first congregation I served the people still talked about the first time my predecessor's wife wore pants to church.

Apparently in the old days the minister's wife was expected to make choices in her couture that did not offend the other women of the church. So, even with our clothing choices there is something social and even communal to the whole business.

While I am not interested in the fashion piece, I am interested in the piece that is about social norms and is about what is acceptable. At the root of that issue is this concept of wisdom.

In my estimation wisdom has little to do with being smart. One can be smart as a can be but not be wise at all. It is possible to have a wall full of diplomas without having an ounce of wisdom. I know that one can be really smart and not have a bit of common sense. We have all known people like that. I know I have some in my life. They are smart but.... I

will say that the same is true in terms of wisdom. One can be smart but lack wisdom.

I see the difference in life of Solomon. His wisdom is evident. We see his wisdom in the kind of choices that he makes. Those choices become patterns for us as we attempt to live into the kind of wisdom that God longs to give us in our walk of life and faith. His character was the essence of wisdom.

Solomon was the king who followed David. Solomon was David's son, and he had a great admiration for what his father had done and how he had served the Lord as king. There was also a humbleness about him as he was called to be the new monarch over the people of God.

It is an interaction between him and God where we learn of the incredible character of Solomon. His character traits were exemplary and without comparison. In him is the embodiment of a kind of God-breathed wisdom.

Such wisdom is worthy of our pursuit.

The soul of wisdom is a vision beyond the self.

Solomon could have asked for riches. He could have asked to be free from challenging enemies or other monarchies. He could have asked for worldly goods. But he did not. When the Lord inquired of Solomon what he wanted, he did not ask for any of those things. He did not ask for anything that is selfish.

Instead, Solomon asked for wisdom. At its core, at its root—at the soul of wisdom is an attention to others. There is a seeing beyond the self.

There is a communal recognition and a desire to somehow impact the lives of others positively.

Wisdom is not an “about me” thing. It is about “what can I do” in order to make this part of the world that I see and touch a better place. The center, the core of wisdom—the soul of wisdom is a vision for seeing the other and having compassion for the other. It gets one beyond oneself.

Wisdom is a corporate, communal trait; it is not an individual trait or commodity.

Solomon saw beyond him to those he would serve and wanted to serve them well. He wanted to serve them. He did not want to own them or reign over them as a tyrant—he wanted to serve them well.

The soul of wisdom is the ability to see others – to see beyond the self.

If there is a soul to wisdom, then let there also be a heart for wisdom. The heart of wisdom is a love for God.

Yes, a love for God is the heart of wisdom. It is very clear in the book of First Kings that Solomon had a love for God. He did not just respect God. He was not merely a good student of the teachings of God. There was more to it than that.

The text is very clear when it says, “Solomon loved the Lord.” Such simple words that say so much—“Solomon loved the Lord.” It is this love for the Lord that is at the heart of having wisdom in this life.

We can know all kinds of things about God (we can be God smart), but we need to do more than know about God. We need to know God. To know God is to know love. God is love. To know God is to know love.

It is that love for God—that passion for God, that longing for God, that desire for God, that thirst and hunger for God—it is that very love for God that becomes the lenses through which we see and interpret the world. And in so doing we see our role in that world and discover what it means to live in relationship with God and with people.

Authenticity of being comes from this love for God. Solomon was authentic in his care and compassion for others because that flowed naturally out of his love for God. The heart of wisdom is a love for God.

Soul, heart, and mind. Wisdom's mind... The mind of wisdom is a consciousness of the time.

The mind of wisdom is a consciousness of time. It recognizes that there is an urgency of time. To put that another way is to say that wisdom recognizes that this moment is not to be wasted but is to be regarded as a gift where we can make a difference in the world.

My friend Bruce talks about people who spend their lives in a waiting room. What he means by that is there are some who are just marking time, just letting life pass by, or just waiting to see what happens next. They are spectators rather than players in life.

We are called to be active participants in our lives and in the world. We have been given the power to touch the world with a real presence of grace. We have been given this incredible gift of life that can be used to shape the world—we can fashion (not as in shoes and socks, but as in

creation)—we can fashion a better world and a better life for those we encounter and those we are in relationship with.

Solomon wanted to make the lives of those he was with better. He wanted to live with purpose. Such is the consciousness of time—that we live with purpose rather than just waiting out our days. Your purpose and my purpose is not a mystery either—it is a known. We are to transform that we touch and those we meet.

We see that transformation most clearly in Jesus the Christ. In his giving himself over he transforms the world showing that such self-less action in love is so powerful that even death cannot stop it.

Jesus stepped into our lives with purpose. Such is wisdom—when we step into the lives of others with a purpose. When we love with the love of God—that is the heart, soul, and mind of real wisdom.

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Whether you wear your flip flops or your black shoes and socks—dress yourself in such wisdom. Wisdom is not an IQ score—it is a lived reality. You choose to put it on every day. Choose to put wisdom on—its soul, heart, and mind. Call it, if you choose....call it Solomon's Fashion! Amen.