



Give me Wisdom

August 15, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Oh Lord, may your word only be spoken, and may your word only be heard. In the name of Jesus Christ the Living Word. Amen.

If God came to you in a dream and said to you “Ask Me What I Should Give You,” what would you say?

Even more specifically, if you had fallen asleep in church, and while sleeping, God communicated to you in a dream and said, “Ask me what I should give you,” what would you say?

That’s something like what Phil read to us from the Hebrew Bible this morning.

But first a bit of background.

Though we haven’t preached on it, since early June we have in our first reading, the Hebrew Bible lesson, been reading through segments of what is called the Succession Narrative—a narrative of the kingship of Israel and Judah, the earthly leadership that would govern the people of God.

It began with the call of Samuel, the call of Saul, the call of David and his sins and successes and tragedies.

Today we arrive at the point in the narrative where Solomon has become king.

He labors in the shadow of the legendary King David, who was not only his king, but also his father.

He is grieving and afraid and overwhelmed and staying very busy with his many religious obligations, keenly aware of his inadequacies. It must have taken days, maybe even weeks, to offer 1000 sacrifices. So, he has camped out near the altar.

In a dream, when his defenses are down, God is finally able to break through to Solomon.

God asks him what he wants: Solomon first admits his helplessness:

“I am only a little child: I do not know how to go out or come in.”

Then Solomon asks for and receives from God a wise and discerning mind, the signature trait associated with him in his kingship. Subsequently, in the succession narrative, it seems that God grants him not only this request, but riches and honor. It is also true that Solomon displays serious flaws as well, reminding us that all of us are a mix of strengths and weaknesses, humans who are not God.



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Solomon finds himself in a place that many of us have found ourselves in before, and may even be in right now. We have been tapped for a task that we have no idea how to accomplish.

We find ourselves in a situation that we feel completely ill-equipped to navigate, thrown, as it were, into the deep end of life.

It may be in a relationship, or a situation with our families, or in our workplaces.

The pandemic continues to put millions of people, as well as governments, and schools, and businesses, in this situation.

Or imagine being in the path of one of the fires that seem to be flaring up everywhere.

Or it may be related to a change in health or work status or a tragic death.

We may be overwhelmed with grief, with fear, with anger.

Praying for a wise and discerning mind, as Scripture puts it, is a good start. And that prayer, with Solomon, begins with humility.

I came across a true story the other day that puts this dilemma firmly and concretely into focus.

It's about a 6-year-old boy about to jump into the deep end of the pool.

It's told by the boy's mother, to her pastor. Apparently, this boy had never jumped into the deep end of the swimming pool before.

And as he moved closer to the edge, he stopped, very unsure if he wanted to make this move. He stayed right at the edge for what seemed like a very long time.

And just when it seemed that he was going to move away from the edge, he looked up to the sky, clasped his hands together and uttered these words: "Oh Lord, give me skills or give me gills." And he jumped. (http://day1.org/6757-skills_and_gills)

Skills or Gills.

We ask God to give us what we need: whatever it is that we need to stay above water; or what it is we need to survive under water--to overcome or to move through; God give me skills or gills.



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I end by putting this prayer a different way. with the full version of the serenity prayer, attributed to the great theologian of the middle of last century, Reinhold Niebuhr.

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
forever in the next.

Amen.