

1 Kings 3:1-15
“For a Good Beginning”
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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2021

The Reading:

Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem. ² The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord.

³ Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴ The 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. ⁵ At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” ⁶ And 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. ⁷ And 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. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹ Give 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?”

¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ 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, ¹² I 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. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴ If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.”

¹⁵ Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.

This morning, I invite you to say aloud what you remember, if anything, about Solomon and his story... (*Jean will field congregant responses and write them on the newsprint.*)

All this and more represents Solomon's legacy for us as people of faith, but **I'm going to focus on the story Tomas read: the young man, Solomon, asking God for an understanding mind – in other words, for wisdom.**

In the first chapters of 1 Kings, Solomon is beginning a new stage of life. He is trying to establish himself in the world, personally and as the King of Israel. Before Solomon asked *God* for wisdom, he complied instead with what those around him expected and valued. For instance, to show that he was his father's son, Solomon rode David's mule into Jerusalem to his anointing. He also dealt ruthlessly with his half-brother, Adonijah, who wanted to be king, and his supporters. Solomon was making plans to build himself a house, as well, to construct a temple for God, and erect a wall around the city. It was culturally acceptable, too, for the new king to find a wife – to make a politically advantageous match. Solomon wanted a future with hope for himself and his people, so he first depended upon his own ideas and made major decisions based on the wisdom of the world.

His situation and aspirations bring to mind the time that our son, finishing college, was entering the work world. Nathan was not the only one! In fact, he invited four buddies to stay at our house, all on the same weekend, because all of them had interviews at Boston companies. Every available space in our condo became a place for a young man to sleep! In the mornings, they each took turns in the bathroom and at the ironing board, while their suits and ties hung on every door.

Since Boston is home to so many young adults of varied backgrounds, cultures, colors, and stations in life, all seeking a future with hope, I wonder how the story of Solomon might speak to them, and how the church can be of support to these young adults as we work for God's purposes, if *we* ask for wisdom.

We don't know exactly why, but Solomon next diverted from the normal path and took the road less traveled. He finally sought out connection with the Lord he loved. This smart, wealthy, privileged ruler humbled himself and went to Gibeon for God's blessing. Solomon asked God for an understanding mind.

It's possible that he had assessed his father's rule and realized that when David had followed *God's* ways, he governed better. When he did not, David made mistakes and got into trouble. Verses 7 and 8 suggest also that Solomon was in over his head, overwhelmed and anxious about his responsibilities. He apparently realized that his *own* thinking was not going to be mature enough for the complicated decisions that he would have to make.

So as Solomon slept, the Lord God appeared to him and asked what he most wanted, not just what he thought he was *supposed* to want, but the deepest desire of his heart. It's as if God said, "You're your own man now. What does loving me mean? How serious are you?" God was pleased to give Solomon wisdom – the ability to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

This Ask – inviting God into his life decisions – was the best thing that Solomon did at this new stage of life. In other words, Solomon acknowledged what the spiritual mentor Thomas Merton wrote about the spiritual journey: "We do not want to be beginners, but let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything but

beginners, all our life.”¹ Solomon was not perfect, but because he prayed for wisdom, he could be truly ‘at home’ in God and actually contribute to the world.

It’s not just younger generations who need this story and Solomon’s legacy!

No matter our age, we are probably standing at some kind of a new beginning today! Solomon shows us that the best thing we will ever do is invite God to grant us wisdom and give us understanding. It ought to be the *first* thing we do! This means being a beginner again!

So I liked that during her report at the Church Council meeting, Mary Howard lifted up the word “discernment.” This tells me that RCC’s Pastoral Search Committee is inviting *God’s* wisdom into their process, which will make for a good beginning between you and your new minister. I hope that our elected officials are asking to be wise as they govern, for this will more surely lead to justice and right in our society!

Advent is the beginning of the Church Year; for Christians, the year doesn’t start on January 1, 2022 but on November 28, 2021. This Advent, if you and I explicitly ask God for discerning minds, it could also be a *good* beginning: spending our time before Christmas wisely, on traditions that truly get us ‘home,’ with the energy to walk into a future with hope!

¹Thomas Merton, *The Climate of Monastic Prayer* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications and Consortium Press, 1973).