

Sermon August 16, 2015 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 Ephesians 5:15-20
“Wisdom: Making the Most of Time”

Wisdom.

Arianna Huffington, co-founder of *The Huffington Post* and author of the book, *Thrive*, stated, “The quest for knowledge may be pursued at higher speeds with smarter tools today, but wisdom is found no more readily than it was three thousand years ago in the court of King Solomon. In fact, ours is a generation bloated with information and starved for wisdom.” Huffington is in a position to know this. For years she enjoyed tremendous success in terms of money and power, until 2007, when she collapsed from exhaustion. Through this, she learned that her life, and her definition of success, needed to change. (Quoted in *The Christian Century*, August 5, 2015, p. 21, by April Yamasaki)

Starved for wisdom; bloated with information - yes, we are, and starved for wisdom.

Prior to our reading today from 1 Kings, David’s older son, Absalom had tried to overthrow his father in a coup. Absalom had gained allies in the northern part of the kingdom called Israel while David’s power base was in the south in the area called Judah. In the battle, Absalom was killed by David’s soldiers and the king was stricken with grief, for this was his second son to have died.

Some time passed, and David—the king credited with uniting the northern and southern kingdoms, died. He had chosen his son Solomon to be the next ruler of the land, but Solomon was young and not experienced as a warrior and ruler. He was unsure how to rule over the nation. So he went to Gibeon, a sacred site, to worship. While he was at Gibeon, God spoke to him in a dream, offering to give Solomon whatever he asked of God.

This is one of those fascinating portals in the Biblical story, an opportunity for us to put ourselves in the shoes of Solomon and imagine how *we* would have responded to this offer. What is it that you would most like for God to give you? Because we’ve read the story, we know that Solomon “aced” it, so perhaps we would try to do the same, but money would be nice. Or a long, healthy life. Or a really good job. Or success for our kids. Or perhaps something a bit less selfish: World peace? Opportunities for all God’s children?

There is a somewhat humorous tale of a man who owned a store in a small town. His life-long rival also owned a similar store in the town. The men had hated each other as boys growing up and they continued to hate one another as adults. Neither made an effort to end their dispute, instead nursing dislike for the other.

In this story, God became fed-up with their bitterness and sent an angel to one of the men one night. The angel said to the man, “God has decided to give you a gift—you can ask for any gift you want and you will receive it. The only stipulation is that whatever you ask for, your rival will receive twice what you get. You can ask for riches, and you will be rich, but your rival will be twice as rich. You can ask for a beautiful wife—and you will have her—but his wife will be twice as beautiful. Ask for long life and you will have it—but he will live twice as long.”

The man thought and thought, and though he knew many things that he would love to have, he could not bear the thought of his rival having an even greater gift. Finally, after much thought, the man told the angel, “Strike me blind in just one eye.” (Found in various sources)

So much for wisdom! That was more like revenge-filled cunning.

In today’s reading from Paul’s letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul counseled the people to live wisely, “taking advantage of every opportunity.” The kind of wisdom Paul was talking about is where a person dares to see our present time as *God’s* time: time to praise and to serve God in everything we do. To “make the most of our time” means to live our lives KNOWING that our time really belongs to God.

Long ago a young man was being interviewed for the job of piloting a steamboat on the Mississippi River. The interviewer, concerned that the applicant was too young to know the dangers of the river, asked if he knew where all the rocks were. To this the young man replied, “No sir, I do not know where all the rocks are. But I do know where they are not.” He got the job. (From *Illustrations Unlimited*, p. 489)

How is it for us, today? We can see some of the rocks. We can see what frightens us, what threatens to sink us in life, those things that we cannot seem to handle. But do we know how to proceed *wisely*, to move through the tough times? What does it LOOK LIKE to be living with wisdom today?

Jesus showed us. Too often our world seems content with the rule of law and justice: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. There must be punishment to fit the crime. But God’s way of looking at life - according to Jesus - is way beyond our attempts to get even. In Christ we see one who insisted on loving and forgiving. Our Shepherd laid down his life for others, even when the others did not deserve or understand it. To have the gift of wisdom, to live life knowing that whatever time we have belongs to God, is to start seeing life from God’s perspective as given us in Jesus, and to be willing to let go of our own more limited ways.

The world jerks us around and often causes us to become people we do not want to be. Jesus offers something different. I paraphrase his offer to us: “Come to me, all you who are having a tough time; the work I offer you will give you wholeness and peace.” (Matthew 11:28, loosely read)

Years ago, a man returning home from a business trip brought his wife some souvenirs. Among them was a matchbox that was supposed to glow in the dark. After she opened it, they turned out the light to see the thing glow, but it didn’t. “Something’s wrong,” the woman said, “it doesn’t glow at all.” The man thought that he had been cheated. Then his wife noticed some French words on the bottom of the box. Taking the box to a friend who knew French, she was told that it said, “If you want me to shine at night, keep me in the sunlight all day.” So the woman set her gift in a south window. That evening, the matchbox offered a brilliant glow when the lights were turned off. (*Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Michael Green).

We are not so different from that matchbox. If we want to have the glow of God's love and God's wisdom within us, we must let ourselves be exposed to God: through the stories and teachings of the Bible, through the hymns of our faith, by the prayers we offer in church and all through the minutes of our lives. We must wake up to the truth that every moment we have is God's gift to us; and all our time belongs to God. By this, we will feed on our Lord and come to see what is important in life. By this, God's way for us will become clear. By this, the light of God given to us in Jesus Christ will shine through our lives into this dark and needy world, and we will have made the most of our time. By the grace and power of God, this can be so! Thank God! Amen.