

August 16, 2009

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:51-58

All Saints' Episcopal Church

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At first glance, one might think Solomon as a brilliant, faithful young man, well suited to take on the mantle as chosen king over the people of Israel, following in the footsteps of the archetypal King David. But, when one digs in, it seems that Solomon has a little bit of a selective memory. He says David walked before God in faithfulness, righteousness, and in uprightness of heart. David did all those things indeed. However, David was not always righteous and faithful. Let's not forget the episode of adultery with Bathsheba and the arranged murder of Bathsheba's husband and the attempted cover up by David of the entire affair. Solomon leaves out those details when conjuring up the memory of David before God. But still, God did forgive David. God kept God's promises, blessing David until the end of his days. Solomon is aware of this.

It seems as if the lectionary for today leaves a few of the details out too. At this point in the story, Solomon already has outmaneuvered his half brother for the right to succeed King David to the throne, aided by his mother Bathsheba, and some close advisors. Afterwards, when his half brother continues to make questionable decisions, which threaten to undermine Solomon, Solomon has him and others put to death. There is even more. Solomon then marries the daughter of Pharaoh, bringing her into Jerusalem, the City of David, in contravention to deuteronomic law. Furthermore, though the Jewish people lack a temple, which forces them to offer incense and sacrifices at local cultic establishments, and though the city lacks the proper walls for defense purposes, Solomon, somewhat selfishly, is having his own house built, at this time, before the Temple and fortifications in Jerusalem.

We also hear today that Solomon offers incense and sacrifices at high places, again in violation of deuteronomic law. The back-story leading up to Solomon's encounter with God is packed with intrigue, murder, adultery, power and succession all mixed with a healthy dose of questionable moral decisions.

Yet, here is Solomon in a dream, but still meeting with God. God says, "What should I give you?" Solomon asks for an understanding mind, the ability to discern good and evil, so he might be better suited to govern God's great people. This man of questionable character and selfish behavior asks for something noble, pleasing God. God grants Solomon a wise and discerning mind, riches and honor. God granted Solomon's wish and then some.

If we were to stretch out the reading today, this wealth, honor and wisdom are all on display in the following chapters of Kings. Solomon winds up as sovereign over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates, to the Philistines, even to Egypt. All bring tribute to Solomon and he acquires massive wealth, builds a massive army and even builds a

massive temple. Furthermore, Solomon becomes known for his wisdom and his fame spreads throughout all the nations. The Book of Proverbs, also known as the Book of Wisdom, contains proverbs attributed to Solomon. Indeed, God granted Solomon's wish and more.

It is quite amazing. God blessed this selfish, negligent, imperfect person in so many ways. Yet, it seems to be the nature of God, throughout time, to bless others, regardless of merit. This is a very good thing for us, because we all know that perfection is not a trait we possess.

Yet though we are imperfect, we are still loved and blessed by a God who responds to our prayers. We have a God who seeks to give us wisdom, who seeks to help us discern right and wrong, who seeks to nourish us. We turn to God in humility and love and God responds to our imperfect love.

Each Sunday we gather here for the worship. We encounter the Word of God, in scripture, which remind us of Gods laws, which centers us, brings us back on track so we can live faithfully. But, that is not really enough. If it were, the Law would have been enough. If the Law were enough, we would not need Christ in our lives.

We hear the guiding word of God each week, yet we do have our moments, each day where we fall short. Granted, as individuals, many of us have not made a string of dubious decisions, like Solomon. But, we struggle. The Law does not sustain us, feed us with all we need. I recently saw a sign behind the counter at an ice cream shop. I have seen it often before, but it is something that I find amusing. It says:

*Dear Lord,
So far today, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or over indulgent. I'm very thankful for that. But, in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed. And from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot more help.*

That pithy, humorous prayer captures who we are as human beings, pretty well. We all have our flaws. We are unable to observe the Law, because, we all have Adam, Eve, David, Bathsheba and Solomon inside of us in some way.

Christ came into the world in order connect us to God in ways that the Law cannot. Christ came to us out of love for us, despite our flaws. Because we could not keep the law, the Word became flesh, in Jesus Christ, giving us a way in which we can become united with God.

Today's Gospel contains rich language, which most of us would agree point towards the Eucharist. Jesus says "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them." We see the Word not only in the flesh, the person of Jesus Christ, but also in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

We are invited this Sunday, every Sunday to abide in Christ. When we partake in the body and blood of Christ we receive forgiveness of sins; we strengthen our union as a people, as a community; we strengthen our union with Christ. We allow Christ to abide in us nourish us and help grant us that wisdom we desperately seek, the ability to see right from wrong, the strength to reject the evils we find in our world, and even in ourselves.

We may not receive the same wisdom, riches, fame, that Solomon received. But, when we come to the table, we do receive God's blessings. We are imperfect people, receiving God's perfect love, through the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have the opportunity, at that moment in time to walk humbly before the Lord and seek wisdom at the feast.