

Trinity Episcopal Church
Lawrence, Kansas
Sermon for August 16, 2009
Proper 15b - [1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14](#)
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

Trinity is passing through a season of transition, between the departure of one rector and the calling of another. I am here because I am a transition specialist and have the privilege of walking with you during this transition to assist you in remembering where you have been, who you are, in strengthening your leaders, in drawing upon the resources of the wider church, and, finally, in making a commitment to a new era of fruitful mission with your new rector.

Transitions are often somewhat daunting. But the truth is, we all have experience with transitions. The longer we live, the wiser and less anxious most people are when faced with change. There are exceptions, of course. I recall the story of a reporter who was interviewing a man celebrating his 100th birthday. The reporter said, "Mr. Smith, you've lived a very long life. I'll bet you've seen a lot of changes." And the man replied, "I sure have sonny, and I've been against every one of them."

Our faith is supposed to help us when we have a transition. So, when the transition has to do with our faith, it takes on added dimensions. That's why we will work so diligently during this year together to draw from the depths of our spiritual resources in this particular time of passage.

Today's passage from the Hebrew Scriptures is especially helpful in that regard because it is the story of a time of transition in the history of God's people. Our Bible is full of them, but this one is more familiar than most. It is the story of the transition from the 40-year reign of King David, considered by many to have been the ideal king, to his son, Solomon.

At the beginning of this time of transition, Solomon takes steps that offer us some insight for our own transition here at Trinity. He leads the people in mourning the loss of their king and his father. We are told that Solomon loved the Lord and walked in the statutes of his father David. So, he goes out to Gibeon, one of the high places, to offer sacrifice to God. The people were still offering sacrifices to God at the places that were formerly places of Canaanite worship because there was no Temple yet in Jerusalem. Remember that God did not let David build a Temple. It was one thing that would not be completed during his reign. His son, Solomon, would be given that privilege and responsibility. Leaders often have to leave before they complete everything they set out to do.

What do you suppose was on Solomon's mind and in his heart as he made his sacrifice? Sorrow over the death of his father the king, grief over the end of an era, thanksgiving for the intimate and unconditional love in the relationship between God and David, gratitude for the bountiful ways God had blessed Israel, exultation for the opportunity to sit on the throne of David, and supplication for divine resources to aid him in the daunting job of governing this people, too many to number? Perhaps all of those things were swirling around in Solomon's consciousness as he approached the throne of the Sovereign of the universe.

So, while he was at Gibeon, Solomon lay down and went to sleep. During the night, God came to him in a dream and spoke to him. God used to do that and still does if we pay attention. Solomon was paying attention! God invited Solomon, "Ask what I should give you." That's a pretty open ended invitation and a very generous one.

Solomon's response is one of humility. He responds with gratitude for God's providence, God's relationship with David, and confesses his own sense of insecurity in the face of the job before him. And then he asks for an understanding mind to govern and the ability to discern between good and evil. It is

important for us to note that Solomon's request was for resources to help him fulfill his role for the good of the nation.

Solomon asks for and receives wisdom. Wisdom is not knowledge. It is a way of knowing. And, for people of faith, it is understood to be a divine gift, not a human accomplishment. Our Psalm reminds us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." St. Paul admonishes the Christians at Ephesus to "be wise." And, according to the New Testament, Wisdom is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. When we talk about the gifts of the Spirit, we know they are given not for personal satisfaction and enjoyment but for the building up of the Church and the work of ministry. During this transition, we pray for the gifts of the Spirit given to the people of God in this place, and especially to those who lead, to be stirred up and evident. If the work that needs to be done in this community of faith, particularly during this time of transition, can be done without the benefit of divine assistance, why don't we get the Chamber of Commerce to do it? Better we should follow Solomon's example and ask God for wisdom and discernment during this phase of our corporate journey!

It's important for us also to note what Solomon did NOT ask for. He did not ask for the things a king of his era might be expected to request: long life, riches, and the defeat of his enemies. It pleased God that Solomon did not ask for these personal blessings. Maybe politicians and corporate leaders should note Solomon's example. Because Solomon's supplication pleased God, God promised to provide those things he did NOT request. But, unlike God's unconditional promises to David, there's a condition: Solomon will have all these things IF he will walk in God's ways and follow the statutes of God as David did, THEN these things will be his.

What are we to make of this conditional arrangement? We're people in a Church that typically emphasizes the unconditional love and favor of God. We are formed by grace and usually suspicious of a theology that involves bargains of this sort. Perhaps one way to look at it is to say that our actions have consequences. Like the law of gravity, if you step off the top of a building, you are bound to fall, not because God is punishing you, but because that's the way things work. Nevertheless, as we will see in later phases of Solomon's life, after the transition, this is an important condition.

The lesson for us is, that the things we do in prayer and discernment for the sake of this congregation's future will in large part determine the future, so after the new rector is here we need to remember this time and the spiritual underpinnings it holds for us.

Like Solomon during that time of transition in the life of the People of God, we, God's kings and priests, turn to God, grieving the departure of our pastor and friend, giving thanks for the good things that were accomplished under his leadership, humbly acknowledging our need for divine resources to lead us through this time of uncertainty and into the future God has in mind, and asking for those things that will glorify God and build up this community of faith for the work that lies before you.

Divine Wisdom dwelt in all its fullness in another descendant of David, another sovereign, the One who is our Host today at the banquet we are about to share. Wisdom and grace at this table are as abundant as the grains of wheat on the wheat fields of Kansas and the grapes upon the vines in your vineyards! As we gather to receive this gift, we will be nourished for the roles we are to play and the work we are to do in the days ahead. Then, we will be sent into the mission field at our doorstep to make a difference – THE difference God wants us to make in Lawrence, Kansas, for the sake of the world.