

Pentecost Proper 15, August 19. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Episcopal Church Freeland WA  
Nigel Taber-Hamilton 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 34: 9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John  
6:51-58

I love our Old Testament reading! It's from what would be described as the History of the Kings - so 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings in particular. Notice how the reading begins? It's like a funeral eulogy - you never say anything bad about the dead. So set aside that bit where David is complicit in murder - getting rid of Uriah so he could marry his wife Bathsheba! Nathan the Prophet reminds David with the story about a king taking the pet sheep of a peasant for his dinner, and thereby allows David to convict himself.

Yet David grew from the consequences of that low point in his life. He grew in wisdom, so that he was thereafter remembered as the greatest King of Israel.

The apple didn't fall far from the tree! Solomon was known for his wisdom. And, I'd say, astute - he was the one who figured out that threatening to cut a baby in half would identify the real mother when a dispute rose between two women, because the real mother would give up her child before allowing such a terrible thing to happen. Here's someone who read people well, and was quick-witted enough to engineer a just outcome to a tricky problem. This story about the disputed baby is given to us as an example of his wisdom, a vignette of the greater person.

Two things about Solomon: first, he knew what he didn't know. Today's passage makes that abundantly clear - there's real humility here, and you can see the nascent wisdom of a young man whose aware of his limitations.

And second, and from a 21<sup>st</sup> Century perspective, with the wisdom that he developed, he became more generous, more flexible with his believing. That greater generosity showed itself particularly in his willingness to see the Divine Feminine as an acceptable identity of God. As 1 Kings (11:4-6) later notes, "Solomon followed [Astoreth] the goddess."

But that didn't sit well with the authors of the Book of Kings, whose authors say about Solomon that, because he followed Astoreth "his heart twas not true to the Lord his God, as was his father David"

And how did it come about that he was following a goddess? Kings has a ready answer: "his wives turned away his heart after other gods." When all else fails - actually, as a first resort - blame the women! Among other things, I'd say, though, that he came to this place because he was responding not out of belief but out of relationship - in this case with the women in his life.

The context matters here. Solomon lived roughly between 970 B.C. and 931 B.C. - so mid 10<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., and from that time to the beginning of their exile in 586 BC, polytheism - worshiping many gods - was quite normal throughout Israel. And even after that, the vision of a consort for Yahweh - Asherah (that's different from Astoreth, but as you can tell from the sound, it's also pretty close).

Polytheism disappears late - as late as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC.

When was Kings written, you ask? Why, after the Exile! That helps explain why it was written – mostly as an explanation for why things went so terribly wrong that God imposed an exile on the Israelites. So this condemnation of Solomon is all about controlling the narrative, of justifying what happened in 586 BC, and saying “now that we’ve changed, now that we worship only one God – Yahweh – everything will be okay.

Or to put it more bluntly: “your men have saved you from the folly of the Divine Feminine!”

And you could add a linked, hidden implication: “Divine Feminine? We don’t want no stinkin’ Divine Feminine”.

Here’s the thing - look at how those in leadership in Israel at the time of the exile responded to the exile, as reflected in what I’ve just described: they responded out of fear.

When we’re fearful we’re more likely to retreat into a defensive position. We close up; we abandon a more open orientation to pretty much everything. It’s a “retreat into the castle and pull up the drawbridge” response – we draw boundaries to make sure that we’re protected, and we keep bad people, or bad stuff, outside.

It’s a very human response, certainly. You can see it happening in our world right now. Most often, I think, our response is to ignore the ‘big picture’ challenge and focus on something that’s secondary, more easily manageable, solvable with traditional methods, and put our energies into that, as if the larger challenges of our lives are not really there. It you spend any time thinking about the sorts of distractions that we get drawn into – or sold by those who seek to control or manipulate us – it’s really quite clear. “Terrible people are flooding our nation across our borders - be very, very afraid! Or people who don’t look like us – even though they’re citizens – are a threat to us, they don’t have our best interests at heart, and they’re trying to take over the country! Lock up your children, bar the doors, stock up on food, and above all, be very, very afraid.....!”

For people of faith, the fear response is present just as much as it is for everyone else. Our challenge is that Jesus explicitly calls us not to fear but to hope, not to close up but to remain open and welcoming, not to build walls but to open doors.

That’s a challenge for us – and it would be foolish to claim otherwise, because it’s “going against type.’ Do we have the wisdom to be generous, to be open to the possibilities that exist in our changing world, or are we going to allow ourselves to be dragged down into a pit of despair?

There’s a book that came out a few years back by Harvey Cox called “The Future of Faith.” His basic point is to say this: the first couple of hundred years of Christianity were genuinely a time that was about faith; the next seventeen hundred years were about belief – philosophical, boundary-setting head-games overseen by a few ‘special’ people that narrowly defined what faith should be, and set up barriers that created an us-verses-them culture. Now, he says, we are finally entering the age of the Spirit, where human longing is moving away from this controlled narrowness into a time of openness, where relationship, not belief is at the center.

Everything I've read underpins that view of a truly dramatic paradigm-shift in human consciousness and belonging that's taking place now.

The young Solomon was wise enough acknowledge what he didn't know. And that humility allowed him to enter into true wisdom, so that later in life, he was open to new possibilities that more insecure people found scary, frightening, fearful. What's our wisdom response to this tsunami of change in human identity? Are we going to bury our heads in the sand, are we going to howl at the moon in the forlorn hope that we'll survive, or are we going to learn to surf?