**Sermon: Seeking Wisdom**

**Scriptures: 1 Kings 3:3-15; James 3:13-18**

**Preached: January 8, 2017 at Grove Presbyterian Church by Rev. Merritt N. Schatz**

What would you do if a genie appeared and gave you three wishes? How would you answer if you were in the Miss America pageant and were asked what your greatest wish is? What would you do if you won the mega millions lottery?

We like to imagine what we would do if possibilities were unlimited. Sometimes we are clever – like using our first wish to wish for an unlimited number of wishes to be granted. Or we might think on a grand scale and wish for world peace or the end to illness. We might envision freedom from our own financial worries, and delight in the ways we could imagine helping others. And, of course, there might be those expensive gadgets or trips which would be fun to have!

It is an interesting exercise to think about what we would ask for if we were given an open opportunity to ask for anything. It is an enlightening experience to see what Solomon does with this opportunity.

Solomon is the second son of David and Bathsheba. Several of his older half-brothers have died; two of them died in the process of rebelling against their father. Several other half-brothers might have expected to be named king. Yet it was Solomon whom David declared to be his successor. It was a great honor – and a tremendous responsibility. Immediately Solomon was challenged by some of his half-brothers. He had to know that his throne was far from secure. He had to wonder if he was up to fulfilling his responsibilities. It is hard enough to govern when you have earned the job. It is even harder when you follow a father like David! Yet Solomon handled the early challenges to his kingship with strength and firm decision.

When the challenges died down, and the life of governing the people became more regular, Solomon went up to worship at the most important of the high places of worship. While he was there, Solomon received this offer from the Lord God: “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

Wow! It was like winning the lottery and getting a personal genie rolled into one! Ask for whatever you want me to give you!

Solomon responded in a way which indicates that he already was wise, and humble. Solomon began by acknowledging all that God had done for his father David. Solomon also humbly includes in the gifts to David the fact that David’s son, himself, had been allowed to follow David on the throne. Solomon understands that this is a gift for David, not something Solomon has earned himself. Finally, Solomon spoke of the gift to himself. ‘You, O God, had given me a job to do. I am honored, but I also know that this is a difficult job. It is a job which carries great responsibility. You have chosen me to look out for your people – to take care of them, to provide justice for them, to provide for their needs. I don’t know how to do this. Please, Lord, give me a discerning heart to judge your people faithfully!’

God is pleased. God responds that God will grant Solomon’s desire far beyond even what Solomon could imagine. God will even bless Solomon in ways for which Solomon did not ask, because Solomon had not asked selfishly.

Solomon had the sense to know that he needed help in doing the job which God had given him to do. He asked for wisdom and guidance in his relationship with others.

Wisdom in relationship is different from intelligence, cleverness, or even knowledge. One can be very smart and still act selfishly. One can be shrewd and successful in material ways, yet lacking in kindness and mercy. One can have immense amounts of knowledge and yet lack the capability of using that knowledge for a faithful purpose.

Wisdom is different. Wisdom seeks understanding. Wisdom seeks God’s own guidance and purpose. Wisdom is humble.

Solomon sought wisdom not for *his own* glory, but for the sake of the people he was called to govern, and for the glory of God. Wisdom looks for the needs of others – and not just the short term, expressed *desires* of others, but for the long term, deeply held *needs* of others. Wisdom considers the needs of the community as well as the individual; and the needs of the individual as well as the community. Wisdom combines righteousness with justice and compassion – not as elements in opposition to one another, but as equal components in God’s grace.

God gives each of *us* a job – usually more than one. Each job we are given has significance. We do not have to be a king to be given a role to play in God’s realm. We do not have to make the headlines of the news to have a part in God’s plan for creation. Each and every one of us is called by God to some purpose. Each and every one of us needs God’s wisdom to fulfill the jobs which God gives us. The good news that we receive in Jesus Christ is that God is willing to give us that wisdom, that grace-filled wisdom. We need only ask. As Solomon asked with great humility, so too are we invited to ask for whatever we need to fulfill whatever holy task God gives us. We ask for wisdom, not just for the responsibilities we receive within the life of the church. Just as Solomon asked for wisdom in governing the life of the people, God’s people, for whom he was king, we are to ask for wisdom in all our interactions with others, that God’s glory and grace in all aspects of life might be revealed.

Two quick stories of how this might look.

Three veterans were on a special episode of Wheel of Fortune. One was doing especially well – in the lead by quite a bit. She was brilliant at picking letters and solving the puzzle, as well as lucky in her spins. The second was doing pretty well also. The third had won some, but was well behind the other two. On the last puzzle, when it was her turn the leader chose the letter “z”. The host of the show was visibly surprised and questioned if he heard correctly. She nodded yes. There was no “z”. The other contestants had their turns. It came her turn again and she asked for “x”. There was no “x”. The game played out and it ended up that the person in third place solved the puzzle, earning an additional $4500. The leader still went to the bonus round. The host questioned her about her odd choices. She responded that it was just how she was seeing things. What became apparent was that she had not suddenly lost her senses. She was creating the opportunity for her fellow veteran to receive a greater share of the prize money available. She was not cheating. She could not guarantee that either of the other contestants would get more money. One of them had to solve the puzzle to earn it. But she had created the opportunity. In wisdom she had chosen to care for others in a way that respected their needs and strengths as well.

Second example - In Bangor, Maine, on a cold and snowy day, a woman named Dawn noticed a man shuffling across the street. As he passed her car she could see that the soles of his shoes only covered the toe section – the rest had torn away. Dawn wondered what she could do. She decided to buy him some boots. But she didn’t know what size and didn’t want to embarrass him. Would it even be safe? She stopped nearby, and called the local police department to ask someone to check on the man and, if possible, to find out what size boots he needed. She went to the Goodwill store – found new socks, gloves, a hat, a coat and some boots. When she took these to the police dept. she learned that the man had been found, had already been given boots and socks from a closet the police department kept.   
The police department’s closet was running low so her gifts were still needed. Dawn did not seek recognition for this act. However, the Bangor police department shared this story on their blog. Dawn responded with praise for the department and with an appeal to others to help that department or whatever department was in their community, by supplying resources like this. Hers was a simple act, a wise act. Kindness and compassion and respect met a need. An everyday encounter was met with wisdom.

Lord , grant us wisdom for the everyday jobs you give us to do. Let Your wisdom, O God, be our gift. Amen.