

## **“Smart Alecks and Wise Ones”**

1 Kings 2. 10-12

Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned for seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

1 Kings 3:3-14

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ‘Ask what I should give you.’ And Solomon said, ‘You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?’

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.’

Ephesians 5: 15-20

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 6:51-58

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.'

I feel the need to make a few explanatory remarks about today's sermon. For many many years now I have been using hometown stories to begin my sermons. I have repopulated my hometown of New Sharon, Iowa with a group of folk that help lead us into the scripture lesson(s).

Or, you are fair warned that I'm about to tell a whopper. That was my intent today; to tell a story about Lotta Smarts and Sol Wiseman, neighbors on Elm Street in New Sharon.

In the story I was going to draw distinctions between being smart and being wise. But in my study and ruminations on today's O.T. lesson I shifted course significantly. So, today I will be telling a hometown story, but it will only deal with Sol Wiseman.

Sol was a handsome fella, who lived in a nice well-maintained house on Elm Street. By the way, there are no elms on Elm Street anymore as the elm disease struck New Sharon years ago and wiped them all out. In my mind, it left the town looking a bit naked, but I digress.

Sol owned and operated a Drug store on the corner of the crossroad in the middle of town. New Sharon is a small town and that is the only major intersection of highways 146 and 63. It had been his parents' store before Sol assumed ownership several years earlier.

The Wisemans were good business folk and the store prospered giving both his parents and Sol's family a good living.

Sol also had the custom of giving out ice cream cones to every student who came into his drugstore at the end of the year and showed him their report card. Every kid liked Sol.

Sol also was that type of person who was very approachable and known for his ability to keep confidences. He was the big brother type for most town folk. Frequently folk stopped at the drugstore or elsewhere to ask Sol for advice. He was a very good listener and would generally steer folk in a good direction in their decision making. People generally felt better after talking with

Sol. Sol was a well-respected, trustworthy and highly regarded man in the community and often accepted leadership roles in town.

The Presbyterian church, where Sol was a member and an elder, sponsored a men's retreat, which Sol attended one summer weekend. The retreat was about life plans. Participants were asked to assess their abilities and interests and then plan where they wanted to be in life next year, in 5 years, 10 years and 20 years down the line. And they were encouraged to engage God in prayer in making the decisions about their future.

Now bear in mind Sol was a successful, happy, and productive person and his life was fine. But as he began to consider his life and his responsibilities to himself, his family, his community and country, he prayed for guidance and ended his prayer asking God for the wisdom he needed to transform his life, into life God wanted him to live.

Sol looked beyond his material blessing and temporal success to those values to last a lifetime and beyond; eternal values befitting a child of God.

God answered Sol's prayer.

And that's the way it is in my hometown where folk a pretty much like folk everywhere else.

Now, the Sol of my hometown, is meant to reflect the life of Solomon in today's scripture reading from 1st Kings.

Solomon's daddy was King David, the most celebrated of the kings of Israel. David had led his kingdom well. Solomon was very wealthy and a successful king. He is regarded as an important prophet, a major prophet in the eyes of Muslims.

Solomon was in a very good place when he ventured to Gibeon to make an offering to his God; the God of his father David, the God of Samuel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was his retreat where he was to consider what the future held for him and his kingdom; to reflect on what type of king he wanted to be. More importantly, he reflected on what type of king, God wanted him to be.

There in Gibeon, north of Jerusalem, God speaks to Solomon and asks him, what Solomon would want from him. And so, the gifted, wealthy, successful king asks for what will make him the best king for his people, wisdom.

What Solomon prays for is transformation, to be changed dramatically, to become God centered in his life.

And, God answered Solomon's prayer and Solomon is known for his wisdom. Solomon was transformed.

When we think of transformation as a rule, I think we think about folk changing from something bad, or not so good, to something better or even great.

Solomon's transformation is from a good place to a better place.

This made me think about this for ourselves. Most of us are in a pretty good place. Despite pandemics and political upheavals, most of us are in a pretty decent place. And sometimes we are just complacent and want to keep the status quo. Let's not change things, we may mess it up.

But is that what God wants for us or just what we want for ourselves?

I think we can see that on a national level as well. We may moan and groan about the country, but we also believe the country is a pretty good place to be. And sometimes we just don't want people messing with it. They might make it worse. But is that what God wants of our country, or what we want for it?

This past year I have spent a good deal of time reflecting and studying the history of our race relations in our country. Most recently reading *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead. An excellent book but very upsetting. I thought I knew history well, but I found my knowledge of the systemic racism in our country woefully lacking. And while I love our country and for much for which it stands, I am appalled by our actions towards black folk, folk enslaved by white ancestors in this country. We are a good country, but we also need to be transformed to a much better country. Racism reflects that type of need.

So, what is wisdom? What is it Solomon and many others have prayed for? Simply it is to stand in awe before God. It is to gain a larger, greater perspective of the world. A perspective not just about our own selfish desires and wants but a perspective that makes God's wants and desires for us paramount. Let us pray for wisdom. Let us pray to be transformed. Amen.