



TOUCH POINT

Alluring Wisdom – Touchpoint for August 14, 2024

1 Kings 3:7-14 (NRSVUE) There's No One Like Solomon

⁷And 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. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil, for who can govern this great people of yours?"

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God 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, ¹²I 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. ¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

Proverbs 9:1-6 (NRSVUE) Wisdom's Feast

⁹Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.
²She has slaughtered her animals; she has mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.
³She has sent out her female servants; she calls
from the highest places in the town,
⁴"You who are simple, turn in here!"
To those without sense she says,
⁵"Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
⁶Lay aside immaturity and live,
and walk in the way of insight."

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NRSVUE) Be Filled with the Spirit

¹⁵Be careful, then, how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

In summary, here's what I'm hearing in these adjoined Bible texts.

1. On a resume to be king, the humility and passion-for-wisdom boxes must be checked.
2. Wisdom is sexier and more enticing than foolishness in the long run

3. Paul had his hands full with multiple cultures in one kingdom

I get the feeling Paul was deeply concerned about the two groups of people he was speaking to: people who listened to the Gnostics expressing their low value of the body who believed all that is important is Spirit; and the other group that perverted grace, who believed more sin, more grace, bring it on. What is the cure proposed? Sing to each other instead, and do it without wine; do it fully conscious! Tell me you don't feel awkward when you read those words to the Ephesians.

In my observation, we are perpetually inept and awkward when it comes to intimacy with others and with God. It may be worse than in biblical times! Paul was able to tap into their sacred passions. When was the last time you went to church and the choir director said, "Okay, turn to your neighbor and sing Hymn 233." We struggle with simply passing the peace or saying good morning!

Our culture has a problem with intimacy. No wonder we struggle with intimacy with God! Our relationship with God in our culture tends to be very heady. Most of the spiritually romantic God-loving mystics we read are dead. Where are the lovers of God to serve as relational mentors today? We seem to be led either by self-serving emotional revivalists or boring academics.

This is what we have to work with here. Paul, the grace guy, doesn't mince words about what the Ephesians' issues are when it comes to behaving properly. In Kings, Solomon talks humbly with God about being a servant king, yet only a little child. Proverbs and the Book of Songs speak of how wisdom is alluring.

I can't see how we have changed all that much for the better since the Ephesians and the Kings. In some regard, like humility, we've become worse. Solomon refers to himself as a little child, a servant king. How beautiful is that? These days only people in treatment centers learn how to deconstruct their egos. Our leaders don't seem to be called by God through humility. Where are the servant kings of our time? It seems most are promoting themselves called of God. Today's epistle may call them vigilante poll watchers, or morality cops or congressional Christian nationalists.

We still struggle with the role that spirituality plays in our bodies as well. When we don't have a healthy understanding of the body, we swing from preoccupations of self-hatred and loathing to arrogance and indulgence.

If we look carefully and seek discernment, perhaps we'll see, right there in the Bible, everything turned on its head.

When have we ever thought wisdom was sexy the way it is written in Proverbs and in the Song of Solomon? Perhaps it's because today's leaders prefer fearful, servile, dependent followers to do their bidding. If that sounds familiar...it's the premise for the movie, *The Minions*. Passion to to serve others, think measured, and be kind do not make an attractive vote-getter for the restless. Wisdom is not alluring as described in Solomon's writings; it is an unfortunate obligation and a duty, rather than satisfying to the soul.

I've never heard anybody say, "Hey! I got to get me some wisdom. I'm going to go home, get some Ben & Jerry's, Netflix-and-chill ice cream and seek wisdom. But why not?!"

A desire for intimacy and wisdom can result in a passion for what is best and most loving toward myself, others and God.

Could we actually be worse off than ancient Israel, the Ephesians, and the Gnostics were when it comes to intimacy with God?

Don't get me wrong: we certainly have advanced in technology, systematic theology, and science, but when it comes to being aware of the most important part of our existence, the body, soul and spirit, we have forsaken the mystics and shrunk down into pathetic little self-conscious whiny superficial bunches of religious prudes or non-religious indulgent fanatics.

Here, I think, is the most important verse not included in the passages presented in today's lectionary, from earlier in Ephesians: "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, walk as children of light."

Perhaps whenever we hear something, read something or need discernment on something, we should remember the light. If the proverb is true and wisdom is sexy, then let's have wisdom with the lights on!

I'm reminded of a song by one of my favorite song riters, David Wilcox, called "Hold It Up to the Light". Below are some of the lyrics.

It's too late - to be stopped at the crossroads
Each life here - a possible way
But wait - and they all will be lost roads
Each road's getting shorter the longer I stay

Now as soon as I'm moving - my choice is good
This way comes through right where I prayed that it would
If I keep my eyes open and look where I should
Somehow all of the signs are in sight
If I hold it up to the light

I said God, will you bless this decision?
I'm scared, Is my life at stake?
But I see if you gave me a vision
Would I never have reason to use my faith?

I was dead with deciding - afraid to choose
I was mourning the loss of the choices I'd lose
But there's no choice at all if I don't make my move
And trust that the timing is right
Yes and hold it up hold it up to the light
Hold it up to the light, hold it up to the light

Biblical passages written to a different culture and a different time lose their purpose and context unless we hold them up to the light.

I just watched the documentary called *1946: The Mistranslation that Shifted Culture* on the usage of the word, homosexuality, in scripture. One of the scholars said something about those texts that I think could serve us better as we consider who the authors are addressing. She says, "This is a text that is time bound, that is determined by the culture in which it was written, but our sense of the Holy Spirit is not

time bound. We must ask ourselves again what's the word of God in this time and place? We're not used to doing that, but that's the task because that is what the Bible does itself."

That is what children of light can do! Hold it up to the light. Perhaps when we hold things up to the light the only thing that can survive is love. In that love, we can be more intimate. To be more intimate means to be more authentic, more vulnerable and more reasonable.

Maybe wisdom is sexy, but only when it is experienced over a period of living in the light, of "doing the next right thing" as big book says. Perhaps Paul was just trying to save the Ephesians, and you, and I, from settling for superficial pleasure and extravagance over the long-lasting freedom and joy of a life fulfilled.

Here's my re-interpretation of Paul's words to the Ephesians after exploring the Greek:

Discern well, how you progress moment by moment in the opportunities your life presents to you. Stay awake, as you regulate and conduct yourself, not as mindless, stupid, rash, people without reflection, so as not to abandon God's ultimate purposes, but rather with a clear mind. Do not become intoxicated with wine and give yourself to reckless extravagance; but be filled to the max with God's living breath as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs among yourselves, tapping into the melody of God's heart in each other. Always give thanks for everything in the name of the only anointed authority in this kingdom, Jesus Christ our Lord.

May we seek Sophia, Wisdom, with all our hearts, minds, souls and bodies, and be genuinely satisfied.

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Hearken to My Voice

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me.
You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face". Your face, Lord will I seek.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, O Lord, and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you. His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you. His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.