

A sermon preached at St. Michael and All Angels' Church, Sandhurst on 23rd July 2017 by Emma Hodge.

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and mediations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever been in a situation where you wished you knew what to do for the best? When you wished you could be wise? You may have even prayed for wisdom in a particular situation. Tonight's Old Testament reading is about someone famous for his wisdom. According to the Oxford Dictionary wisdom is defined as **"The quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgement; the quality of being wise."**¹

Solomon is famous in the bible for his wisdom and tonight's Old Testament reading features the well-known example. It is also the first instance of Solomon using his gift. While most of us will have to been in a situation where we have had to make a difficult decision and needed the gift of wisdom. Most of us probably would not have been in the situation which we find Solomon in from tonight's Old Testament reading.

Before we look at the reading and what it means for us, let's go back a bit as the background is key.

Solomon had just become king following the death of his father, King David, Solomon was young and he was overwhelmed with the prospect of being a king. He knew that to be a good king, he would need to understand the people he ruled over, and to make good judgements on the situations presented before him by the people he ruled, in effect he knew he lacked the key gift of wisdom. Solomon acknowledged that everything comes from God and that God is able and willing to bless those who follow him with different kinds of gifts. Solomon appealed to God for the gift of understanding and discernment to judge between good and bad. As Solomon honoured God, God granted Solomon's request.

A few verses later we come to our reading, where Solomon is presented with a situation which at first glance is a classic claim and counter-claim situation with no evidence available to back up either person's claim (DNA testing hadn't yet been discovered!). As an added complexity to the case is that the two women were prostitutes, which, just as now, are not the highest level of society.

Solomon uses his God-given gift to solve the problem in a way that appears shocking (who else would suggest splitting a baby in half and giving one half

¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wisdom>

to one person and the other half to another person). This is a shocking way and while the king did have the power of life and death, suggesting to cut a baby in half would have been shocking but it did provide results of proving who was the true mother. Solomon solved the problem using the God given gift that he had been blessed with but also his actions lead people who witnessed the story to see that God is working through Solomon.

So how does this relate to us today?

Solomon received the gift of understanding and discernment from God. Each of us have also received gifts from God, they may not be of understanding and discernment, but then we are not kings in the Old Testament meaning of the word. Some of us have received the gift of music, others the gift of languages, others the gift of hospitality and these are just three examples of the gifts that various people here tonight will have received, the gifts we have are many and varied as we are all unique and are in different situations. But each of us need to take the time to identify which gift or gifts we have been given by God (and we all have at least one). So the first thing we have to do is to identify our gifts.

Solomon not only received the gift, but he put it to use. Now for the majority of us, our gifts will not be required to solve seemingly impossible situations, where the only solution is to suggest split someone in two! But we will be in situations, where we have an opportunity to use our gift, whether that is by making music to give enjoyment to others or offering someone a listening and understanding ear. The critical aspect isn't what our gift is but whether we use it or not.

The use of his God given gift by Solomon not only helped the two women but had wider consequences, of showing the presence of God to those who witnessed it. When we use our gifts, we also help people, both those we intended to help and those who see God through our actions. If we are not sure, let's look at the example of music. When we hear music, our emotions can change depending on various aspects such as the style, the key, the tempo and many more aspects. Those who are musically gifted and make music are those using their gift. Those who hear the music engage with those who are utilising their gift and will enjoy the music to help them express either something about their spiritual side or their feeling. Then those who heard third hand about how great the music was and how it made people feel enables them to realise that people are blessed with different abilities and these are not just because of the interest but because individuals have been blessed by God.

So while we may not be wise like Solomon, we all have gifts from God which we can use to solve problems, help other people and ultimately lead people to see God through us using our gifts.