

Solomon, the younger of the remaining sons of King David, is anointed king at his dying father's behest- and in spite of the older half-brother Adonijah's self-promotion and assumption that he would be king. Before David dies, he reminds Solomon to walk in the ways of the Lord, while still advising that he consolidate his power by recognizing those who are loyal supporters and getting rid of those who would have proven disloyal to David. And so very soon after David rests with the ancestors, Solomon orders the assassinations of Adonijah, Joab and Shimei. It's a ruthless purge, including even killing Joab as he clung to the altar of the Lord for sanctuary. And I haven't even mentioned the dubious marital arrangements by which Solomon sought to strengthen his kingly power, which are also reported in Chapter 2. These parts of the saga are not included in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) selections from the First book of Kings.

“So, the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (1 Kings 2:46b).

Now that is decidedly NOT what I recall about great and wise King Solomon, as depicted in the 1965 Golden Press edition of the *Complete Children's Illustrated Bible*! I remember a vividly dramatic color illustration of two women pleading before Solomon, while a soldier, with sword at the ready, prepares to cut a disputed-over infant in two. The story goes that when one woman relents and begs that the child be allowed to live and be given to the other, Solomon wisely deduces that she is the child's true mother and orders that the child be given to her. Chapter 3: vs 28 concludes of this incident, “all Israel heard of the judgement that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute judgement.” That part of the story isn't in the Revised Common Lectionary either, although it follows immediately after the verses heard in today's reading.

I guess that I must be far more fascinated by this juxtaposition than the organizers of the RC Lectionary were. Because Solomon now becomes a less mythic character and a far more human, complex and imperfect person. Just like his daddy, the great King David, who danced before the Lord, and appropriated Bathsheba from her husband, and caused him to be killed in battle to cover the adultery. David: Complex, human, imperfect, at times ruthless, AND who “walked before (the Lord) in faithfulness, in righteousness and in uprightness of heart” (3:6).

The text tells us right after the tale of the ruthless murder of his father's enemies and of his brother Adonijah, that Solomon “loved the Lord.” On the heights of Gibeon, Solomon offers lavish sacrifices to the Lord, a devout action with an edge because worshipping the Lord in those formerly pagan sites was forbidden by Deuteronomistic law. There's nary a hint of remorse or guilt over the vengeful murders indicated.

Still, at Gibeon he falls into a dream in which YHWH appears to him with the offer of any gift Solomon should ask. And in the dream, Solomon asks for “an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil” (3:9). One needn't be a Jungian dream analyst to detect that, on some level, Solomon might have had qualms about his recent nefarious activities. And that, on some level, he recognized his own frailty and need for wisdom and strength to govern.

More importantly, the story of the dream indicates God's pleasure at the request. It's AS IF God knows their weaknesses, and their faults, and their love for God. It's AS IF God continues to want to teach and guide them in covenant and give them wisdom in life.

I want to just bask in the ambiguous tension of David and Solomon's imperfections and God's steadfastness in relationship with them, because it feels SOOO encouraging to me. As someone who should well and truly have a t-shirt (or even better, a tattoo) that says “I love Jesus but I cuss a lot”, there's real grace in remembering Solomon and David and their relationship with God. Just as there is real grace in remembering so many other

God-Seekers and God-lovers and God-servers before us who, with their flaws and amidst foibles and heinous mistakes, continued to walk with God through their lives, seeking and loving and serving the God and striving to grow in wisdom and understanding.

That image of the God who knows and loves us and wants to give us wisdom and life, indicated in the stories of David and Solomon, continues to echo through time, even to our day. And it is made incredibly tangible and present in today's Gospel text. Here in a new way God extends the invitation to God-seekers and God-lovers and God-servers. Jesus invites us to the feast of the living bread from heaven that nourishes us to life eternal with his abiding presence. And it is a very physical invitation to take God's real life into our very being, to gnaw on Jesus's presence in the bread of heaven and in our lives, that we may grow in the life and wisdom of God.

And so, Sunday after Sunday, we gather around the altar
as real, complex, imperfect people, from a long line of real, complex and imperfect people;
as followers of Jesus asking for the gift of his presence in our lives and our very selves;
opening our hands to receive the gifts God so wants to give us in Christ,
to receive the wisdom and strength and healing and hope
for another day and another week of seeking and loving and serving God.

Come to the table!