

Connecting the Dots
A Sermon On 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14
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Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil...

Today we jump back into the Biblical saga of the early kings of Israel. Earlier this summer we considered parts of the story of King David. We began on June 28 with the familiar story of David and Goliath and we discovered that when it comes to facing gigantic challenges we are better served by embracing an attitude of hope and trust in God than by relying upon the anxiety of others. On July 12 we looked at the imperfections of King David and discovered that what God truly wants of us is true and sincere devotion rather than public righteous posturing. On July 19 we considered the final days of David's reign and we saw how the true dwelling of God is in our hearts rather than in an elaborate temple meant to draw attention to temporal power and authority. Today we come to the end of David's life and the transition of leadership from David to Solomon. Our scripture tells a relatively little known story of Solomon's conversation with God regarding this transition of power. More often than not this scripture is thought to illustrate the conferring of wisdom upon Solomon setting up the new king to follow in his father's footsteps and exceed his father's effectiveness. I have no doubt of the validity of that interpretation.

However, given that both King David and King Solomon represent God working through severely flawed people – David was an adulterer and a murderer and Solomon's first act as king was to forge an alliance with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's pagan

daughter and bringing her to Jerusalem – perhaps the real value in this part of scripture is found in examining God’s amazing ability to work through the lives of terribly flawed people.

A friend of mine recently spoke of the old children’s pastime of playing connect the dots. I had dozens of those books back when I was a kid. I remember well the excitement of watching a collection of random marks on a page emerge into a cohesive picture that fit into a story. I always thought of this exercise as a forward looking exercise. Connect the dots and discover where the story is headed. That is a valid way to understand what is happening with this game. My friend suggested another way to understand the exercise. He suggested that, in life, connecting the dots is a way of coming to understand your life as a part of a larger picture. Connect the dots and see how life fits into the overall scheme of God’s plan for the world. Connect the dots and see that every experience in life has something to teach. Connect the dots and realize that we live in a divine matrix and that meaning is discovered once we appreciate that we have a place in something that is beyond our own selfish interests.

This is where I find power in the stories of David and Solomon, Abraham and Sarah, Matthew and John. This is where I find the connection between the great characters of the Bible and the experience of a congregation such as ours celebrating 175 years of Christian witness. Time and again in the Biblical narrative we find flawed and sinful people claimed by God and redeemed for the purpose of advancing God’s divine plan. There is not a single Biblical character that is purely faithful; not Abraham, not Sarah, certainly not King David nor Solomon. Every Biblical character I can think of struggled to find and understand their place in a plan that went beyond themselves. Most

started out thinking that religious devotion was a good way to accomplish their own plans for power and advancement. Jesus' disciples followed him from Galilee to Jerusalem focused upon what he could do for them and their lives. Only after his resurrection and the day of Pentecost did they awaken to the fact that they had a place in a purpose that transcended their personal agendas. Only then did they take the gospel out into the world. Only then did they embrace the power that comes when we find our place in the emerging purpose of God.

This is my hope and dream for my life and our lives together in this church; that we take our place in the fulfillment of God's bigger picture. I pray that we will be a church where those who thought that life was nothing more than a game of acquisition and consumption might discover that God has a greater purpose. I pray that we might be a church where the flawed and the broken discover that they too can be redeemed and put to work in the fulfillment of God's vision for hope and justice and peace. I pray that we might come to know that faith goes way beyond just thinking the right thoughts about God. Faith is in fact finding our place in God's big picture and living with a radical trust in God that transcends the uncertainty and ambiguity of life.

If Christianity is to speak to the hearts of an ever more secular culture it must make room for the complexity and ambiguity of modern life. It must rediscover a vocabulary of hope and abandon its vocabulary of judgment. This is precisely the tension between Jesus and Pharisees. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Keep these things and you will have fulfilled all of the law." If Christianity is to be heard in a world of fear and doubt, it must speak with a

reassuring voice of trust and faith. We are the ones who's job it is to invite others to take their place in God's grand scheme of redemption and love.

When I was a child I loved to play connect the dots. I thought then that the fun was in discovering what lay ahead in the story. Now I see that my life itself is a dot, a piece that fits into a larger picture of God's love and hope for the world. I am not alone but I live as part of a matrix of God's purpose. Ministry has become helping others understand their connection in that same picture. Faith has become a matter of taking my place and trusting that whatever happens in life I have been a part of God's movement toward peace, hope, joy and love.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

1 Kings 2:10 - 12 (NRSV) ¹⁰Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹²So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

1 Kings 3:1 - 2 (NRSV) ¹Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. ²The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD.

1 Kings 3:3 - 14 (NRSV) ³Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴The 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. ⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶And 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 toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. 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 your great people?" 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."