

# SOLOMON'S PRAYER

Post Presbyterian and Christian Churches

July 27, 2008

1 Kings 3: 9-12

**“Give your servant 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.”**

About a year ago, I was very involved in the dying of a beautiful and gifted 36 year-old-woman who was a wife, daughter, sister and very devoted mother of two young children. Every time I went to their home that was bursting with family and friends and food and frenzy, my stomach hurt. Her dear mother told me that it had been so hard to comprehend her daughter's recent and sudden grim diagnosis because Susan had been able to receive chemotherapy, care for her family and even finish the school year as a speech

therapist just weeks before she died in late July. As I did my best to bring comfort and care to the circle of love and life that surrounded this once vibrant woman in the midst of a despairing and grief-ridden situation, my faith was forever changed. I was grateful to find Solomon's prayer this week to add to my repertoire of personal prayers because since Susan's death last summer, I have often known what I was **not** able to pray for myself in difficult times but I had not yet formulated any prayer that seemed fitting for me to pray deep in my heart when relationships and work have been out of control.

The night I was called to go and be with Susan and her family as she died, I realized that I could no longer ever ask God to allow me enough time on this earth to see my children grow up. Elliot is almost 13 years-old and Katherine just turned nine, and while Kyle and I tell them often how much we are looking forward to "our empty nest," we realize we have many years to go before they will be grown! I know that Susan's five year-old daughter and seven year-old son will be forever changed by the sudden death of their loving and adoring mother, and while they will always know of her great love for them, her absence will have wide effects on the influences and the choices that will form who they will become. As I went home that calm, hot July night after helping Susan's

brave and loving family through her peaceful dying, I realized that I could never again ask for the gift of a long life.

As a result of watching innocent children, life-filled young mothers and accomplished middle-aged fathers die through my years in Hospice work, I have begun to pray less for specifics in my own life and more that God's will would be done and that God's grace and love incarnated in people and circumstances would be enough to sustain and nurture my life in difficult times. On good days, I now more often pray for a life well-lived than for a long life, and while I have never prayed for the death of my enemies, I must confess that I would probably feel slight pleasure and then guilt if harm or misfortune did come to the people I perceive have hurt me or my loved ones!

Before reading Solomon's prayer this week, a prayer that had sustained and centered me in God's love was one I received in the mail from my aunt and uncle who attend The Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago. They have had the privilege of hearing the Rev. John Buchanan preach most Sundays now for several years and he has a rare gift of being able to communicate holy and human things in very understandable ways. John told his congregation he keeps a copy of Sir Jacob Assley's prayer on his refrigerator at eye level so that he can see it and read it every

morning. He said that the prayer is written in old English script and is attributed to Sir Jacob Assley, who supposedly prayed it before the Battle of Newbury. Sir Jacob's prayer is this:

“Lord, I shall be very busy this day.

I may forget Thee but do not Thou forget me.”

John Buchanan says that he loves this prayer because of its remarkable affirmation of God's presence in the midst of human life at its most human. He goes on to say, “I love it because it contains the basic hopefulness of our religion; namely that there is nowhere you and I can go that is God-forsaken, not even those places where human life is profane and violent and tragic. I love the promise that God is not dependent on my attentiveness.”

John Buchanan says, “I love that prayer because, like you, I am very busy and get so busy that I don't live with a constant minute-by-minute awareness of God as a presence, or a companion. On the contrary, we are so busy with the battles of Newbury in our lives that we do forget God, we forget everything except the demands of the minute. And so, I love the prayer that reminds me that even though I may be so busy that I have momentarily forgotten God, God has not forgotten me. And finally, I love this prayer because in the very least it suggests that it is in those very

times and places and experiences in which we forget God, that God is most immediately present to us, committed to our well-being and deeply involved in our lives.”

The reminder that God is present with us, committed to us and involved in our lives in the ordinary busyness of our days gives us the security and perspective we need to be able to ask God in difficult times to give us an understanding mind to discern what is right. None of us is perfect and when we do bad things and make bad choices we eventually and painfully discover that we are not morally or ethically lone rangers. When confronted with the many crossroads, events and decisions that come our way, we realize that we live in a web of relationship with God, with one another, and with all of creation that responds to the choices we make.

I just finished reading the book, **Beyond Basketball, Coach K's Keywords For Success** written by the Duke University Basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski and his youngest daughter, Jamie Spatola. Kyle and Elliot both read it two summers ago when it first came out and I am grateful that I took it with me to Possum Kingdom last weekend. In this book, Coach K offers 40 short, hard-hitting essays that educate and inspire. Each essay is centered on an important keyword and is illustrated with anecdotes from his personal and professional life experiences. What Coach K said

about the word commitment illustrated for me how we can do good things and follow our hearts when we are fortunate enough to have God incarnated in the supportive people in our lives who are committed to us no matter what. This is what Coach K says about commitment:

“Aside from the vows I took with my wife, Mickie, thirty-seven years ago, the most life-altering commitment of my life came from my first athletic director at Duke, Tom Butters.

In 2004, representatives from the Los Angeles Lakers came into my living room and offered me \$40 million to become their coach. In the days that followed, my family and I did our best to evaluate who we were and where we were going. In that time of self-analysis, I called my former Athletic Director, Tom Butters.

‘Mike, what are you calling me for?’ Tom asked, surprised to hear my voice.

‘Well, whenever I need good advice, I always come to you. And right now I need some good advice, Tom. Someone just came into my house and offered me \$40 million to coach their team. Now, when I first signed on at Duke in 1980, my starting salary was \$40,000. We’ve come a long way since then.’”

Tom jokingly replied, “Well, I think I deserve a 10% finder’s fee.”

“Sounds fair,” I responded. “I’ll send you a check for \$4000!”

We both laughed and enjoyed the moment before delving into the more serious aspects of my situation. When it comes time to make important decisions, I always seek Tom’s advice. His commitment to me, even after my first three seasons with a 38-47 losing record, is why I was able to get things going at Duke. I never doubted his support. And because he was committed to me and never doubted me, **I never doubted me**. His commitment made me better because I was never afraid of losing my job. It is easy to be committed to someone or something during good times, because when you are winning, your commitment is never challenged. But loyalty and dedication during more difficult times can be tough. Tom never wavered, and when commitment doesn’t wave, that’s when you have the greatest chance of winning. And we did win!

During the seventeen years that Tom Butters was my boss, he always told me to follow my instincts. Even when we had losing records, he never interfered, he only asked me that I ensure our student-athletes were a good representation of Duke both on and off the court.

When I think back on his decision to hire me, I am amazed. Tom told me years later, that, following my job interview in 1980, he simply couldn't get me out of his mind. He tried to convince himself that I was not the right one for the job. But when it came down to it, he just had to follow his heart. From that day forward, we were on the same team.

Tom Butters gave me the same advice on that summer day in 2004 that he always had. He told me to be myself, to make sure that I continue to do what I love, and to follow my instincts. The decision became easy. Because of Tom's commitment to me, I developed a commitment to Duke that I knew I could never give up. Not only that, but he taught me to be committed to myself and to follow my heart. As long as I am coaching, I will give my Duke teams the very same commitment that Tom Butters gave to me."

I have great respect for Coach K and admire the fact that \$40 million was not enough to change his values, his commitments or his heart. This picture of how Tom Butters was totally committed to Coach K, even after his first three losing seasons, is a poignant example of God's unwavering commitment to us incarnated in people who are willing to listen to their hearts and follow their gut instincts.

As Coach K's life exemplifies, following our heart, using our gifts and passions to make this world a better place and doing the right thing truly makes a difference, not only in our lives but in the lives of those with whom we relate and respond to on a daily basis. As King Solomon's prayer suggests, when we follow our heart, do the right thing and make right choices, we are doing God's work in our world.

This week while I was updating Elliot's membership in the United Future Leader's program I came across a quote by Albert Schweitzer who boldly proclaimed, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

This week's **Christian Century** (July 29, 2008) highlights a church being a church in the best sense, a church that has truly found ways to serve. "The Church of the Holy Apostles is a landmark in New York City, with a high arched ceiling and gorgeous stained-glass windows. Over the years the Episcopal congregation dwindled in size as the neighborhood changed until the 200 members could no longer afford to pay the bills to keep it going. A new rector suggested that if the church was going to go

out of business, it might as well do some good before it closed its doors!

So in 1982 The Church of the Holy Apostles launched a free-lunch program and thirty-five people showed up. The program grew and attracted more people and outside support and in a few years the congregation was serving 900 lunches daily and bursting the seams of its mission house.

In 1990, during roof repairs to the main sanctuary, a fire broke out that caused major damage. During insurance-covered restoration and renovation, and while the pews were out, members came up with an idea: Why not leave the pews out permanently and use the worship space, which was empty and unused Monday through Friday, for the lunch program?

Now, twenty-six years after they planned to close their doors, the church is serving 1200 meals a day and volunteers do most of the work. They take the tables down on Friday afternoon and set up folding chairs for the worship services on the weekend. The budget is now \$2.7 million, which comes from businesses, foundations, and the city of New York---and the 200 members, who, instead of closing down a church, are part of a vital and compelling community of faith.

The program rules are simple: no proselytizing and no one turned away. If anyone wants more food, that person can go outside, stand in line, get another ticket and eat again. Elizabeth Maxwell, of the Holy Apostles church staff said this about the religious motivation behind the program, “Well, we do this because Jesus said to feed the hungry. There’s no more to it than that. Jesus told us to take care of the poor and hungry. In all the intricacies of scriptural interpretation, that message---feed the hungry---could not be more clear. Those of us at Holy Apostles feel we have a Sunday to Monday connection. The bread and wine of the Eucharist we share on Sunday be comes the food we share with our neighbors during the week.”

The editor of The Christian Century says this, “Maybe the world would find churches and Christians more interesting and compelling if they showed something of the love of Jesus in their lives and practices. Maybe there is no more important and life-giving strategy for every church than finding something Christ-like to do.” (John Buchanan, p. 3)

May we give thanks on this day for a God who is most immediately present to us, committed to our well-being and deeply involved in our lives whether we are aware of it or not. We also give thanks for prayers that help us in the midst of our business

and busyness to find our way back to what is right and to what we need for wholeness and fullness of life. And we are humbled and most grateful for opportunities to use our gifts, passions, time and abilities in ways that bring life and healing to our unfinished world and our incomplete selves. Amen.

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Loving and Gracious God, We gather on this beautiful summer day to give thanks for the many unique ways God seeks us out so that we may more fully experience the transforming power of his love, grace and forgiveness. As we hear about the escalating violence in our world we are aware of how difficult and discouraging life can be for all of us at differing times in our lives. Remind us again that power, success and happiness as the world knows them, are for those who will fight for them hard enough, but that peace, love and joy are gifts to be received only from God. We pray that in our strivings to find meaning, purpose and greater wholeness we will allow our faith to inform us and encourage us. Give us the courage to not beg God for favors but to ask God for the wisdom to know what is right and the will to do right and good. In the midst of the chaos we so often encounter in our lives and in our world, may we be open to finding God in ways that lead us to live with greater love and faith.

We pray on this day for all of our friends and family in our midst who are sick, hospitalized, grief ridden, depressed or dying. In their pain and suffering, may they know God's love, comfort, and mercy, and may we find ways to remind them of their value to us, to our community, and to our Lord. As we go about the business of our lives, may we allow our faith and our sense of community to direct our course so that we never take for granted our holy connections with people and with you, O, Lord. May the choices we make in the ordinary living of our days reflect the humility, gratitude, and responsibility we have in the everyday discerning of what is right for us and what are the right ways we can be using our gifts, talents, passions and time in the service of others.