

**Sermon**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**Sunday, August 18, 2024**  
**10am**

Text: 1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

Theme: Worship with Rejoicing: Benediction

[prayer]

This story begs the question: If you had one wish, what would it be?

Perhaps you have an answer immediately in your heart and on your lips. But if you are like me and you freeze up a little with indecision, don't worry about it.

I was a child in the 1990s during the Disney Renaissance, a period when the Walt Disney Company produced a slew of critically acclaimed animated films based on fairytales and classic literature. One of their highest grossing films during that period was *Aladdin*, an adaptation of the Middle Eastern folktale "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp."<sup>1</sup>

When I read the story of Solomon's wish, my mind immediately jumps to the story of Aladdin, and suddenly the voice of God has morphed into the voice of Robin Williams. The film version and the original folktale are different from each other but suffice it to say that a genie grants Aladdin several wishes, which he uses to become rich and powerful, marry well, and defeat his enemies. In the animated film, Aladdin is given precisely three wishes and the drama hinges on how he chooses and whether he makes the right choice.

Choices reflect our values. If Aladdin wishes for wealth and power, then what Aladdin values is the control and influence that wealth and power can give. The Disney movie ends with a twist – Aladdin uses his final wish to set the genie free from the prison of his magic lamp. In the end, Aladdin demonstrates he values friendship and sacrificial love.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aladdin>

Three wishes are better than one, I guess, but I still find the three-wishes scenario challenging. I want my hypothetical wishes to reflect my highest values, and deep down I am afraid that I will choose wrong and betray myself.

God is not a wish-granting genie, and we should always guard against treating God that way. But I wonder: Did Solomon feel any indecision before making his famous choice? Did he harbor any regrets later? This story is much older than the *Aladdin* folktale, but there are definite parallels. Solomon could have asked for money, or military power, or a long life. He grew up watching his father, King David, struggle to keep his kingdom. David's tenure as king was marked by betrayal, bloodshed, and infidelity. I imagine this history created some anxiety in Solomon as he took the throne. Perhaps he wanted to lead differently than his father.

The narrator tells us that "Solomon loved the LORD" (v. 3). But the favor God shows Solomon is not because of his piety. In fact, God offers his favor despite errors Solomon has already committed as king. Read the rest of chapter two and you learn that Solomon secured his throne much like his father – with violence. Just prior to this verse in chapter three we are told that Solomon has married an Egyptian princess – a shrewd political choice, but also one that flouts God's clear prohibition against foreign marriage. The narrator also informs us that even though Solomon "walk[ed] in the ways of his father David," he made sacrifices and burned incense on the shrines in the Canaanite high places (v. 3). The Temple has not been built yet, and Solomon does not seem in a great hurry to break ground; instead, he is busy building his own palace.

But Solomon is still a devout man and so he goes to Gibeon to make sacrifices to God. Gibeon is the most prominent of the high places, where the Tabernacle (tent of meeting) was located. Ironically, Solomon did this while the Ark of the Covenant – the very symbol of God's presence – was residing in Jerusalem.

Still, despite this flawed act of worship, God chooses to make himself known to Solomon. God comes to him in a dream and commands him to "Ask whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you" (3:5 CEB). Is this a test? Does God already know what Solomon will ask for? If we believe in free will, then we must believe that Solomon was free to make all manner of selfish and greedy requests. God knew that – which is why God's grace is so amazing, to risk making such an incredible offer to Solomon in the first place.

Solomon ultimately makes the wisest choice of all: Humility. He acknowledges his limitations and need for guidance. “No one is able to govern this important people of yours without your help,” he says (v. 9). And then he asks for the wisdom to discern between good and evil and govern God’s people as God would have them be governed: with justice and mercy.

The book of Proverbs opens with this teaching: “Wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD” (Prov 1:7 CEB). What Solomon asks for is ironically the same thing Adam and Eve desired when they ate the forbidden fruit. Their inability to discern between good and evil became the root of human sin. The difference, though, is that Solomon did not ask for wisdom so he could be like God. He asked for wisdom so he could be a better servant of God. He understood that he was appointed king to help God’s people flourish in relationship with the Lord (1 Sam 8).

Thomas W. Blair writes, “Wisdom is more than knowledge; it is also more than getting all you want out of life. Wisdom has to do with ‘alignment.’ The intent of the exercise of biblical wisdom is to bring the soul into alignment with God’s ways, because the human soul has a propensity to become out of alignment with God’s ways.”<sup>2</sup>

One of our hymns springs to mind:

*Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!  
Thou art the potter; I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me after thy will,  
while I am waiting, yielded and still.*<sup>3</sup>

This is the wish of a truly humble servant of God. As Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10 KJV). Solomon is a model of faith that seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...and all other things were added unto him (Matt 6:33).

What God pronounces over Solomon in response to his humble request has all the marks of a benediction. The purpose of a benediction is to both bless and charge

---

<sup>2</sup> From *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 266.

<sup>3</sup> <https://hymnary.org/hymn/UMH/page/394>

with an action. The word “benediction” comes from the Latin *bene dictio*, which means “a good word.” Benedictions are a good word that goes with us and enables us to righteously pursue the kingdom of God. Solomon came to Gibeon to worship the Lord. And after his divine revelation, the Lord left him with this benediction: “a wise and understanding mind,” “wealth and fame,” and “a very long life” – so long as Solomon obeyed the ways of the Lord (vv. 12-14).

Solomon’s wish demonstrates how important it is for us to ask for the things that God values. What we ask for matters. God granted Solomon’s request for wisdom and discernment because these requests reflect the character of God.

Neither Solomon’s legendary wisdom, nor his wealth, longevity, and political influence, were because of his own righteousness. The narrator is clear that Solomon was by no means perfect. But God still took the initiative and came to Solomon even while he was a flawed and imperfect person. God does the same for us. God offers us the same grace. This is the mind-bending wisdom of our God. The Apostle Paul preached, “Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom. This is because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:24-25). Our responsibility is to respond to the grace we have received from God through Jesus Christ with the same humility that Solomon offered at God at Gibeon.

The benediction – this special blessing that closes our time of worship – is our weekly answer to God’s command, “Ask whatever you wish” (v. 5). In the benediction, we stand together as a community, and we humbly ask for a blessing from God that we do not deserve and we are not owed. Specifically, we ask for a blessing that will extend this hour of worship into our daily lives. The benediction inspires us to live our lives in the same spirit that we have received here. The benediction reminds us that worship never really ends, that worship is a way of life lived out through our actions beyond these walls – acts of mercy and justice as we walk in the Way of Jesus. At the end of our worship service, we ask for the power to live as God has commanded us.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, the Director of Worship Arts Ministries for Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church, shared this story about the purpose of a benediction:

“In a children’s worship arts group I assist with, sometimes we ask the kids to bless one another at the end by doing a communal benediction that goes something like this:

Leader: What good things do you want God to do for one another and the world? After each answer, we will all say “Yes!” together.

Kid 1: Good sleep!

Everyone: YES!

Kid 2: No fighting anywhere!

Everyone: YES!

Kid 3: A good day at school!

Everyone: YES!

Leader: In all things, God bless us!

Everyone: YES! Amen!”

Benediction is asking God to align our hearts with His will so we can say “yes” to the good God want for us and for our neighbors. That alignment is the beginning of wisdom.

Amen.