“Solomon’s Wacky Wisdom”

1 Kings 3: 4-28

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October 26, 2014

This morning we find another story that doesn’t often appear in children’ bible, or if it does it is censored.

If you think about it, it’s a rather gruesome story

As an expectant mother, I find it particularly disturbing.

I have no doubt that pregnancy has skewed my interpretation of this text.

What we’re supposed to conclude, according to all of the commentaries, is that Solomon was a wise man.

A flawed man, for sure. But a wise one.

We’re supposed to be amazed by his display of wisdom.

Perhaps we should assume that he knew what the outcome of this situation would be, that he never intended to harm the baby.

But we’re never clued into this during the narrative.

We’re never told that Solomon felt confident that his threat to cut the baby into two would reveal the true mother of the child.

Which is why I approach this story with a bit of hesitation and skepticism.

I’m not really convinced that Solomon was using his wisdom in a good way.

He certainly wasn’t using it in a compassionate way.  
One of these women is distraught over the death of her child.

A compassionate leader would truly use his listening ears, given by God, to hear the whole story.

To look for more evidence.

To send investigators to examine the scene of the death and go beyond the brief statements made by each woman.

But Solomon didn’t do any of that.

He just heard each woman claim that the baby was her own, without go through the legal procedure of investigation.

Just another time that Solomon, the man deemed the most wise in the Bible, has broken the law.

Previously he has married an Egyptian woman, which is forbidden by the sacred law and he has worshipped at a high place, not in Jerusalem where the ark of the covenant is located.

It seems Solomon believes himself above the law.

So, if Solomon isn’t a law abiding leader, what does that say about his wisdom and ability to lead the people of Israel?

Now, I don’t want to write off his wisdom all together.

He was human after all, so even with great wisdom comes human limitations.

But in this particularly story, was he the wisest character?

If not, than who?

There are two other characters whom we can consider.

The two women.

They weren’t exactly reputable women.

Both were prostitutes, likely living in a brothel.

Pretty much the lowest people on the totem pole. They didn’t have much credibility in society.

It’s surprising that their case went before the king.

Marginalized people don’t tend to have their disputes considered by the most powerful person in the land.

But for some reason, their conflict over whose child died is deemed worthy of the kings attention.

There’s the one who tells the King to kill the child so neither could have it.

She hardly puts up a fight, after her initial claim that the baby is hers.

What happened there?

Was she so distraught over her baby’s death that she wanted another baby dead?

Or, was she the real mother?

Was it that she would rather have her child killed than grow up in such a cruel and corrupt world?

Toni Morrison Beloved illustration of Sethe

Was the woman trying to protect her child from life in a cruel world?

Then there’s the other woman -

She also doesn’t put up much of a fight for her child.

After her initial testimony that the child is hers she gives up in response to the king’s threat.

This woman would rather see her child in the arms of another woman than see it die.

This is the common story of mothers in Central America giving up their children to USA

For this woman, she chose to give up her child so that it might live, not knowing that she would be rewarded for her wise answer when the king awards the child to her.

So again, who is the wisest person in this story?

Solomon was given wisdom by God, but it seems he forgot to ask for compassion to go with it.

Later on in his story we find other instances when he abused his power. That doesn’t seem very wise.

That being said, it seems the woman who was willing to give her child to the other woman is the wisest character in this story.

Her love for that child is so great, and in the midst of this crisis situation, she is able to keep a cool head and think through the consequences of her request.

Yes, she is asking that her child be given to another.

But her wisdom tells her this is the way to save her child.

She had to sacrifice in order to save her baby.

There is much wisdom in this decision-making.

This week our Sailboat Church book discussion focused on how to turn a rowboat church into a sailboat.

There was much discussion on practices for life in the Spirit –

Practices like prayer and living in community are what make it work.

The author reasons that church can’t be done in isolation as individuals.

It must be done in community.

Anytime we live in relationship with others we must compromise and set our egos aside for the sake of others.

I’m learning this lesson as JT and I think about baby names.

I think I’m going to have to let go of “Peton Manning Longino” (which works for boy or girl).

JT doesn’t seem as thrilled about naming our child after a football player.

Even if he is a Presbyterian.

I’m going to have to set aside my own, albeit goofy, desire for the sake of our marriage.

When it comes to being the church, we are sometimes faced with situations similar to the two women and the baby.

Both sides want the same thing, but that is impossible to accommodate.

When we the church discern the direction it ought to head in, sometimes we have to give up those things we hold dear.

We have to give it up, so that life is made possible.

The author of our book reminds us that we have to let go of control and we have to let go of our comfort, if we’re going to move forward as a sailboat church.

Life in the Spirit, seeking the wisdom of God, means humbly letting go of our desires and wants, for the sake of community.

This is what the baby’s true mother does when she tells Solomon to give it to the other woman.

This is what God does in allowing his Son to die, so that others might live eternally.

This is what must do when it comes to being in relationship with others.

Compassionate wisdom means knowing when to let go of our personal needs, so that the community may thrive.

Life is made possible because of that sacrificial love.

We just need to have the courage to let go of our own desires, in order to ensure the best possible outcome for everyone.

Succeeding in doing so shows true wisdom, given by God, immersed in compassion.

We might just be surprised that when we set aside our own desires, we will be rewarded with a great gift, just like that mother being given back her child.

Let us pray.

Holy Wisdom,

When we ask for wisdom and understanding, you grant it to us, even with all of our flaws.

Fill us with such understanding and knowledge that is filled with compassion,

that we may act as instruments

of your loving desire for creation,

working with you to transform

our conceit into concern for others,

our fear into love,

our violence into peace,

and our brokenness into wholeness.