

SERMON: 2018/08/19 (13th Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-20 & John 6:51-58

[Invite children to the front.]

Last week I told you that, on just *one* occasion, Jesus called himself the "Bread of Life" at least *three* times.

Three times!

Wow.

This idea must be really important to Him.

But why?

(It's not necessarily obvious: the issue caused the Jews to "argue" [*'dispute'* - v. 52] among themselves as to His meaning.)

Why does He want us to know that He is *like* bread?

After all, you can't make a sandwich out of Jesus.

So, He must be speaking *symbolically*.

Well, what does bread *represent*?

What is it often a symbol - a "shorthand" - for?

Especially in the Bible...

Food.

And why do we need food?

[Wait for answer.]

To live! Yes.

It is essential.

Like oxygen

And water.

These are things, which are *essential* to living.

We die without them.

So, if nothing else, Jesus is (sort of) saying, "I am like these things."

Food, water and oxygen.

I am essential to your lives.

Not an optional extra.

Yes, you can do alright without me for a while.

Like holding your breath;

or going on a diet.

But, eventually, you'll suffer - badly.

And the solution, therefore, is to have lots!

Lots and lots of Jesus.

As much as can whilst you can.

Let's pray: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

The King is dead!

(Long live the king.)

...

The death of an autocrat is always a moment of high tension and anxiety.

Just for a moment the realm totters on the brink of anarchy.

Who will ascend?

Who will fill the yawning vacuum at the top of the "pyramid"?

The empty chair on the dais?

Consider: even more than our own Noah Stefanick, *David* had had about *twenty* sons altogether [see: [1 Chronicles 3:1-8](#)] - some of whom died before reaching maturity [see: [2 Samuel 12:13-19](#)] - which isn't unsurprising given that this was the (early) Iron Age - and others had met various "sticky" ends like Amnon and Absalom in their adulthood.

And it wasn't obvious that the eldest survivor, Adonijah, should be the successor. I say "not obvious" because there wasn't yet, in Israel, remember, much precedent for dynastic succession: David was no relative of Saul's, and before them the People of God had been ruled by "Judges," men *and women* displaying transparent, *undeniable* giftings from Heaven - the freakishly strong "Samson" [[Jgds. 14:6](#)], the undefeatable warrior, "Shamgar" [[Jgds. 3:31](#)], etc. The fact that elsewhere in this hemisphere this was the case meant Adonijah assumed he was a "shoe in."

And in a verse that we "skipped over" this morning, verse 15 [[1 Kgs. 2](#)], he goes around to his relatives declaring "'You know that the kingdom [is] mine'", right? *Right?!*

And Joab the great general - who we've heard lots about in recent weeks - supported Adonijah's claim; but few else did: [[1 Kgs. 1:7-8](#)].

And, *critically*, Nathan *the prophet* favoured Solomon: [[v.11-27](#)].

With Zadok the priest, he took the boy to the Gihon, the main river flowing past Jerusalem - where *half* the city was probably bathing, washing their clothes or fetching water - and, in front of them, anointed him from 'the horn of oil' [[1 v.](#)

38-39] that Samuel had used for the very same purpose decades earlier: [1 Sam. 10:1].

The message was clear.

And so the purging began: Adonijah was murdered at his home [1 Kgs. 1:53, 2:25], Joab was assassinated as he cowered for sanctuary in The Tabernacle: [v.28-34a], and Shimei, a foreign noble who was a close ally, was executed at the palace: [v. 42-46a].

Thus, the author of *Kings* tells us, '[peace] was established', [v.46b].

Frankly, the whole messy "business" reads like regime change in some dreadful "Banana Republic."

Ecuador in the nineties, for example:

President Abdalá Bucaram, 'an extraordinarily crass and vulgar man' [n.1], - nicknamed "El Loco" [n.2] - was suddenly declared unfit by his own government, but refused to "step down," and 'barricaded himself in his office'; [n.3] prompting two other contenders to declare that they too were *also* [now] the president. [n.4] One of these hopefuls, Rosalía Arteaga, convinced the military to back her claim, and *for two days* she was the first female incumbent of the post before being deposed herself. [n.5]

Truth, my friends, is stranger - *and often more interesting* - than fiction.

And I mention this - my first point, really - because there are those who question the reliability of the Scriptures; who claim that these narratives [1 & 2 Samuel, Kings] are a 'novel' [n.6] (to entertain), fabrications of 'propaganda' about which we should be 'suspicious'. [n.7]

But, '[t]he content of the [Old Testament] is not "invented history" and never was. This is [a]...crude antibiblical (almost anti-Semitic) [libel], and ultimately nothing more.' [n.8]

[Pick up Bible-readings insert.] This stuff is *embarrassingly* honest.

What, for instance, were those 'high places' at which Solomon 'sacrificed and offered incense'? [1 Kgs. 3:3b]

The word in Hebrew is "*bāmâ*."

And if your "heresy antennae" aren't nervously quivering with suspicious excitement, they should be!

'For the most part, the...Bible *vilifies* worship at [the] "bamot" and joyfully lauds their destruction.' [n.9]

And certainly this admission gives our author cause to pause.

Everything *e/se* is all good:

'He loved the LORD', he obeyed 'the statutes' - that is, "The Commandments." [v3:3a]

So, this is a great king we're talking about, isn't it?

A *holy* king?

But then we hear, *oops(!)*, oh yeah, 'only' he used to perform bloody devotions - as many as a '*thousand*' - at "the high places."[\[v3:3b\]](#)

Now, some commentators leap on this "nugget" like a bored house-cat onto a stray ball of wool.

Ha ha!

Syncretism.

Backsliding.

Paganism.

But notice that whilst he was at the *bāmâ* in 'Gibeon' - that's a hill in north-central modern Israel, 'the LORD appeared to [the new king]...'[and] said, "Ask what I should give you."[\[v.5\]](#)

Notice, He didn't begin with a tirade against Solomon making some egregious error, which would have perfectly justified *if* the place at which the supplicant was in attendance *was dedicated to some non-existent, capricious sky-fairy.*

But God doesn't.

He just gets right to the matter at hand.

So, '[a]pparently,' reading "between the lines," what the king was doing there *was* 'in the name of the one true God.'[\[n.10\]](#)

Which suggests, '[p]erhaps, [that] at this early stage of Israel's history, before the temple was built, it was acceptable for people to worship at such places. After all, where else could they worship?'[\[n.11\]](#)

And Gibeon itself may have been a menhir - a large standing stone such as at Stonehenge [\[see: 2 Samuel 20:8 - 'the large stone that is in Gibeon'\]](#) - one that long pre-dated the arrival of the Israelites.

It was, then, if you like, a pilgrimage by the new king.

Although not *exactly* that - or, that is to say, not *merely* that:

his visit to the Gibeon cultic-centre was also very 'politically expedient'[\[n.12\]](#)

because it was the focus of an area, which, according to *2 Samuel* 21 [\[v.2\]](#),

continued to harbor a significant populace of Canaanites, who thus 'required special attention to draw them into the Israelite nation.'[\[n.13\]](#)

Under Saul, despite Joshua's earlier efforts to drive away the pagan nations, 'the Gibeonite cities [remained as] an *alien* enclave which cut across the center of his kingdom'[\[n.14\]](#) - a bit like the belt on a tunic, dividing it almost in two; but he managed to conquer them and even made the place his home - his *capital*.[\[n.15\]](#) Indeed, he himself - a descendant of Benjamin - may have *also* 'had a blood link with the Gibeonites.'[\[n.16\]](#)

And it remained a diverse, heterogenous community - one at odds with - *in competition with* - the Jerusalem-based, southern, *Judahite* Davidic monarchy; refraining to endorse it right away, and, initially, aligning itself behind Saul's son

Ishbaal (who was their preferred candidate for the throne).

It was only when a team of the very best 'picked soldiers' of Gibeon - their elite youth - were slaughtered as they guarded the towns' reservoir, that their military resistance was - finally - broken.[2 Sam. 2:12-17. See also n.17]

That Solomon should now show such favour to them by attending at the local shrine was a *shrewd* move to win (some very wounded, ill-disposed) "hearts and minds."

Does that make sense?

Allow me to elaborate by way of an analogy:

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England, the northern hill-country - such as where I lived, in Yorkshire; and, beyond that, Scotland - was (also) prone to rebellion and secession.

And the Plantagenet kings in London had to make regular trips to the region to "pacify" it in various ways: this included, as you can probably imagine, some pretty brutal campaigns; but, when they were in a more diplomatic mood, their tactics also included pompous, colourful visitations to the great cathedrals.

Henry (the) III, for example, (son of the naughty "Prince John" of the Robin Hood legend), visited York minster a number of times to participate in various services *as part of* the process of subjugating the locals.[n.18]

It was pure "P.R."

And the same thing is happening in our text: *2 Chronicles* puts it this way:

'Solomon summoned *all* Israel, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, the judges, and *all* the leaders of *all* Israel, the heads of families. Then Solomon, and the whole assembly with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon...' [1:2-3]

This is clearly a very tactful "publicity stunt."

Solomon, therefore, is already evidencing his "trademark" characteristic - the one which, we see, he then asks God to bless him with: *wisdom*.

And one could make a great deal of this small detail - about how the gifts of God are already within us but only sleeping, latent, dormant. And how this is a legacy of our creation in His image - one entirely compatible with an evolutionary view of such things; of *super*-natural "seeds" planted in all of humankind - unique to our species among the animals, that we can ignore, neglect *or pray* for further nourishment of from the Source.

It took, after all, wisdom to ask for wisdom.

And a lot of it.

Like wishing to a genie for more wishes.

It's clever!

You know the philosopher Socrates determined that a person's knowledge of

themselves and the world begins when they acknowledge their ignorance of those things; their *deficiency*.^[n.19]

Only when we can say, with sincerity, "teach me," can we be taught, and so *grow*. It's paradoxical, really.

And we'd be caught in a self-defeating circle of mediocrity except that, '[t]he true light, *which enlightens everyone*, [is in] the world.' (*John* 1:9.)

In all human beings right *now*.

The evidence is all around us.

But so *too* is the fact that there could be so much *more* of the same!

If only, like Solomon, we would entreat our Creator to *enlarge* those God-given qualities we've been endowed with.

It begins with prayer.

Let's reflect.

Footnotes:

1. Pineo, Ronn (2007), *Ecuador and the United States: Useful Strangers*, Athens, G. A.: The University of Georgia Press, 208.
2. *Ibid.*, 205.
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4. Pineo (2007), 208. See also: Lauderbaugh, George (2012, *The History of Ecuador*, Santa Barbara, A. A.: Greenwood (ABC-CLIO, LLC), 149.
5. Lauderbaugh (2012, 149.
6. Ash, Paul S. (1999), David, *Solomon and Egypt: A Reassessment (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 297)*, Sheffield, U. K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 111-112.
7. Whybray, R.N. (1968), *The Succession Narrative : A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kings I and 2*, London: SCM, 19.
8. Kitchen, Kenneth A. (2003), *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Cambridge, U. K.; Grand Rapids, M. I.: William B. Eerdmans, 462.
9. Nakhal, Beth Alpert (May 1994), 'What's a Bamah? How Sacred Space Functioned in Ancient Israel', *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume 20, No. 3, pp. 18-29. (My italics.)
10. Ryken, Philip Graham (2011), *King Solomon: The Temptations of Money, Sex, and Power*, Wheaton, I. L.: Crossway, 48.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Konkel, August H. (2006), *I and II Kings (The NIV Application Commentary)*,

- Grand Rapids, M. I.: Zondervan, 78.
13. *Ibid.*, 79.
 14. Blenkinsopp, Joseph (January 1974), 'Did Saul Make Gibeon His Capital?', *Vetus Testamentum*, Volume 24, No. 1, pp. 1-7, 3.
 15. See the article above. Also: Ishida, Tomoo (1977), *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 123.
 16. Brooks, Simcha Shalom (2016), *Saul and the Monarchy: A New Look*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), 61. See also: Demsky, Aaron (April 1971), 'Genealogy of Gibeon (1 Chronicles 9:35-44): Biblical and Epigraphic Considerations', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 202, No. pp. 16-23.
 17. Fensham, F. C. (July 1970), 'The Battle between the Men of Joab and Abner as a Possible Ordeal by Battle', *Vetus Testamentum*, Volume 20, No. 3, pp. 356-357.
 18. See: Jones, Sarah Rees (2013), *York: The Making of a City, 1068-1350*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 125.
 19. See: Plato and Nevill, D. F. (1901), *The Apology of Socrates*, London: F. E. Robinson & Co., 38-40