

SOLOMITES
[written in oral form]

1 KINGS 2:10-12; 3:3-14
Proper 15, Year B

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I appreciate, yet dislike GPS navigation, such as with Google maps.

They give such a narrow view / a limited perspective, that I feel disconnected from my surroundings,....like I'm in a bubble.

There are often times that I don't want the fastest or most direct route. It's nice to take a scenic way,.....or discover something new because of an errant turn.

Also, they demand blind trust for the most part, and blind trust is very risky. In 2016, a Kitchener woman was obediently following orders from her navigation app in a dark foggy night. She was directed to drive down a boat ramp right into lake Huron,.....and she did.

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Yet, on the other hand,.....when I moved here, four years ago, I was completely dependent on GPS navigation for getting around the crazy KW road system. Whoever, laid out the roads here was either drunk or lazy. They must have merely paved existing animal trails. They certainly didn't abide by the traditional grid system, nor did they have a compass. The plus side: police pursuits are rare. The police can simply wait, and the person fleeing will likely end right back in front of the police.

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GPS navigation is handy and easy, yet the old way had some valuable benefits. Paper maps provided the bigger picture, with lots of options. There was a sense of orientation--one could see that they were near a lake. Also, when you got lost, you had to ask directions. You had to trust people. It was a community thing. Navigation apps give the narrow view, and confidently present the chosen route to be the best one.

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A cursory read of today's text presents a narrow view of Solomon, and to be sure, it's a noble and convincing image.

Verse 3 states that Solomon was a religious man. He loved the Lord.

After his father, King David, died, Solomon had a dream. Dreams were considered a tool that God used for communication.

In the dream, he was tested by God. God asked the new King Solomon, who was about 18, "Ask what I should give you."

Solomon's response was absolutely wonderful.....and worth remembering.

He humbling said, "Give your servant an understanding mind to govern people (the literal translation is, a hearing heart to judge).

Solomon also asked to be able to discern good and evil, which is another noble request.

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God was impressed by Solomon's request. He didn't ask for riches or a long life. So, God granted Solomon's wish, and rewarded his humility with riches and an honourable long life,..... if....

If, Solomon lived in God's ways.... like his father David did.

That last part should give us pause: David wasn't that pure and faithful.

Nevertheless, we are presented young King Solomon as the humble, understanding, discerning.....monarch.... all ordained and rewarded by God.

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The name Solomon means "Peaceful". The prophet Nathan called him "Jedidiah" which means "Divine Darling." That's a very sacred label.

Solomon was very religious, and he did have the temple built.

Moreover, for 40 years, there were very few battles. He placated adversarial Kings and Pharaohs by marrying their daughters. He was politically shrewd,.....and he had many wives.

And, did I mention he was rich.....very rich.

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This glimpse we are given presents Solomon's many desirable and exemplary traits, worth mimicking, yet.....no one was called a Solomite. No one claimed to be a follower of Solomon. A subject of the King--Yes, but not a follower.

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A digression:

Back in the 1980's, I was first approached by my Mennonite friends to change denomination and become a Mennonite. My initial reaction was, "I don't want to be a follower of some guy named Menno. I'm a Christian; a follower of Christ.

My understanding and view then was very limited.

Mennonites are not followers of Menno Simons, and they never were.

Back in the mid 1500's, Menno, the former Catholic priest, nurtured and taught a group of persecuted Anabaptist his theology of peace. His congregation grew, but they resisted the Mennonite label that some were giving them. Eventually, the expanding group accepted the name, in part because it helped in association and identification, and the greater community realized Mennonites were not like the violent, rebellious segment of Anabaptists. In other words, the label brought them a degree of acceptance, ....at times....

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We are not followers of Menno, yet I do hope we still hold dear his pacifistic theology.

Today,.....Mennonite is a denominational name, and the associated identity is like the KW roads.

You may think you know where you are going, but you're likely wrong.

The Anglo name Allaby is a Mennonite name.....because I'm Mennonite. And, a typical Mennonite is either African or Asian.

See how the big picture changes things?

The broader view tends to pop bubbles.

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Likewise with Solomon:

He was smart and clever, but not so nice or humble.

Today's story reflects an attitude toward Solomon probably contained in a laudatory biography with a few additional sentences from the point of view of the Deuteronomic compilers in the late 7th century BC. This account was not verbatim. It was crafted for a purpose. [from Midrash commentaries]

The purpose was to set a model for all future leaders.

Solomon was born into privilege, the second child from Bathsheba. The first died. He was favoured by his father David.

Solomon was precocious, and very well trained to be King. He wasn't quite the naive, overwhelmed young man presented in today's text.

Once in power, even though we are told he could discern good from evil, he systematically had all his rivals to his throne Killed!

He lavished upon himself many grand palaces, and yes he did arrange to have the temple built. Certain Biblical writers loved the temple, yet a temple altered theology and religious disciplines. Instead of God being known as everywhere, God was now contained in a "house." That narrowed the view, and....made being religious a little tidier.

Moreover, Solomon erected sanctuaries/temples to other gods... in order to appease his numerous wives. Many were from other cultures. According to the law, doing that would be considered high treason to God.

The grand view shows Solomon to be a disappointment. His political manoeuvring and arrogance generated many adversaries to Israel....which tore the kingdom apart after Solomon's death.

And I dare say, with all those wives and mistresses, Solomon must have had a stable of lawyers to buy them off and keep them quiet.

Nevertheless, Solomon was both admirable and scandalous,....as are most things in life,....when we view through a wide angle lens.

And, we must learn to live with that tension.....every grasping to discern good from evil,.....and then choose the right path.

However, let us not be blinded by the dirt. The lesson presented in today's text is worth remembering,.....well most of it.

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May we humbly seek God's help in having an understanding mind,
as we discern right decisions in a world of good and evil.

That is worth holding on to.
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The troubling part of the lesson is God's promise to reward good behaviour with riches. Emphasizing that part leads to the theology of prosperity, and that is Not the way of Christ.

The OT is full of citations stating that we will prosper when we obey God's laws and walk with God. This passage suggests the prosper means riches.

Written in hind sight, with a narrow view, it's understandable how that interpretation was made about Solomon.

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Even so, let us not be motivated by reward to make right decisions.

Let us Not strive to be good Christians in order to reap an easier or privileged life.

I think, sometimes, we drift into becoming Solomites when we assume the way of Christ should be easy and painless.

Jesus presented the big picture--a world full of contrast... and a world that desperately needs love and grace.

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The GPS navigation app is a handy tool to get a person from point A to point B,.....but that principle has no application for living.

We live in a twisted, convoluted world, full of inconsistencies and chaotic roads. It is important to take the effort to see the whole picture / to learn and research what is going on,.....so that we don't drown blindly following crafted rhetoric.

Moreover, without community / without help from others, we may become disoriented, even lost. We are Not self sufficient, even though our privileged status tempts us to think we are.

We need each other more than we realize.

We need each other.....in part.....to help discover love.

Love endures through the confusion and fog of contradictions.

Christ endures beyond the brutality of the cross.....because he lived God's way.....and God is Love. Love endures.

In humility, may we surrender our personal guidance system to God / to love.....realizing we are all in this together..

We are children of God....who follow the ways of Christ together... with all of creation.

That is our hope.

Let us open our eyes to see the big picture....with God.