

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

Today is a special day for us as we will be celebrating
the retirement of a long-time and faithful custodian,
as well as bidding our Christian brother farewell
as he moves back to Puerto Rico later in August.

So it might seem odd to have a text that takes place
at the beginning of Solomon's work of being Israel's king.
And add to that oddity, today's theme of Providence.

But this is a great text to meditate on for these occasions
because we get to see the Lord's grace as He provides
His people with servants who desire God's will,
who seek the good of God's people,
and desire to serve faithfully.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

...God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward You. ... And now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people.... Give Your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern Your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this Your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ... (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.

Amen. (John 17:17)

Not many people have been given the opportunity
that Solomon was given: to ask anything he wanted
of the Lord with the promise to fulfill his heart's desire.
Who of us would have blown that opportunity?
Who of us would have asked for something selfish
like great riches, or fame, or simply for a peaceful life?

We see that Solomon already displayed some wisdom
as he asked the Lord for a hearing/ discerning heart.

Do you ever wonder where it is that he got the idea from?
Did it just come to him in that moment?
The answer might surprise you, but it really shouldn't.

I will let Solomon tell you himself. He says in Proverbs 4:3,
**When I was a son with my father,
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
he taught me...** He learned it from his father.

Remember when Solomon said, **"I am but a little child"**?
He was taking his cue from David who had reminded
Israel's leadership not too long before
that Solomon was **young and inexperienced.** Chronicles29:1

Remember when Solomon asked,
**"Give Your servant therefore an understanding mind
to govern Your people,
that I may discern between good and evil..."?**

David had encouraged Solomon,
"Now, my son, the Lord be with you...." 1Chronicles22:12
Only, may the Lord grant you discretion & understanding..."

Already, Solomon had gained some wisdom
simply by being attentive to his father's instruction.

While there are times in which God does step into history
and miraculously provide for the needs of His people,
as He did here granting Solomon's request and
as Jesus did with the feeding of the 4,000 in the Gospel,
normally the Lord provides for our needs
through a more natural means... through people
like parents, our spouse, our jobs, good government,
and the like.

Here in our text, we see the Lord continuing to provide
for His people a discerning and just government.
Through the instruction of his righteous father, King David
(righteous because of his Savior, not of his own account),
Solomon also began his reign over Israel with a desire
to serve the Lord by serving the Lord's people justly.

Soon after our text, we read examples of his discernment

played out in real life, like with the ploy to cut a baby in two in order to correctly identify the true mother. But there are also his books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes which show, not simply a wisdom that even the world can appreciate, but which identify and demonstrate the true source of true wisdom: **the fear of the Lord** and ordering your life according to His Word/revealed will. Solomon also expresses the futility and hopelessness of chasing after worldly wisdom and pleasures. He called it **vanity, a meaningless chasing after the wind.**

That being said, sadly, Solomon did not use his godly gifts throughout his reign in all faithfulness and uprightness. We heard how the Lord promised to bless him, not only with discernment, but also wealth, fame, and peace from all his enemies so long as he continued in the way of God's Word. That wealth and fame became a snare to him. As his fame grew, he accumulated more and more wives; and his many wives led him to stray after their gods. Years after faithfully building and dedicating the Temple, He faithlessly used his great wealth to built temples to their false gods as well. In this, we see that while God provides for His people, people can take those blessings and be ensnared by them.

We also see then that it is indeed a gracious thing when the Lord provides the blessing of a faithful servant who not only begins, but steadfastly continues and ends his career of faithful service so honorably/charitably, and even more when the service so directly serves his fellow Christians in the Church. For it sets before the Church and school a pious example and opportunities for godly instruction for the many generations that are able to witness it, without the scandals that detract and turn people away.

But even such blessings can be opportunities for temptation, as we worry about "who will now step into the gap?"

Who will faithfully take on all those responsibilities,
responsibilities that weren't part of a job description,
but were simply done as a member of the congregation?
We might even be tempted to idly wait for someone else
to take up a responsibility when it is within our power
and ability to do, and so we would fail to serve
and instead insist on being served.
Or we might find ourselves angered that others aren't
stepping in or stepping up, as we believe they should.

But that we may avoid these and other temptations
that may come upon us on account of our blessings,
we pray to the Lord as Solomon did,
for a discerning, a listening heart.
A heart that can rightly examine itself and distinguish
the evil from the good, based upon God's holy wisdom.
A heart that hates and confesses it's evil,
and seeks God's righteousness through Christ.
A heart that desires first to be served by Your Lord
through the life and death of Jesus,
that craves the pronouncement of the absolution;
that hungers for the Lord's body and blood;
that dreams of and daily takes the opportunity
to find true wisdom in God's revealed Word.
A heart that desires to serve others charitably/generously
with whatever gifts God has provided us.
A heart that sees itself simply as a steward of the Lord,
using the Lord's blessings for the Lord's purposes.

This prayer for wisdom isn't just one for the beginning
of each new task, it is for the entirety of your life,
for each new day, and each service
that Lord provides for your neighbor through you.

And like Solomon, we don't have to wait and wonder
if God is going to answer that prayer or not,
because this is the kind of heart that He has already
revealed to us that He desires for us to have
and promises to give.
But while we may wish that He would just miraculously

zap us with this wisdom, it comes in more normal ways.
Like Solomon, you learn discernment and godly wisdom
from your active study in God's Word, as He said, Prov.1:7
"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."
You learn it from your spiritual fathers;
if you have been so blessed, from your biological father;
You can learn godly wisdom from your pastors;
from reading the Lutheran Confessions, the Catechisms;
from reading the Church fathers,
from learning solid, Lutheran hymnody.

And just so that we are clear, this wisdom is not simply
the ability to compose or recite proverbs.
It is the ability to discern what is good, right, and salutary
from what is evil, wrong, and detrimental to your faith.
It is the ability to recognize the Lord's gifts to you
and to thank and praise, serve and obey Him with them.

Godly wisdom sees Christ's righteousness & forgiveness
as the key to this life and the next and seeks to attain
them in the ways that the Lord has provided:
through His infinitely wise Word & in His Sacraments.
By these means He gives you not only His wisdom
but also His holiness, life, and salvation.
By these means, the Lord releases you from your guilt,
from your idleness, from your worry, and selfishness,
as you see Jesus using His gifts of His holy body and
blood and selflessly offers Himself on the cross for you.
By these means He *creates in you a clean heart,*
and renews a right spirit within you.

God grant this spirit to us all. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria