**Family Service Talk 21st August 2022**

**1 Kings 3:16-28**

***A Wise Ruling***

***16 Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. 17 One of them said, “Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. 18 The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.***

***19 “During the night this woman’s son died because she lay on him. 20 So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. 21 The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t the son I had borne.”***

***22 The other woman said, “No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.”***

***But the first one insisted, “No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.” And so they argued before the king.***

***23 The king said, “This one says, ‘My son is alive and your son is dead,’ while that one says, ‘No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.’”***

***24 Then the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought a sword for the king. 25 He then gave an order: “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.”***

***26 The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!”***

***But the other said, “Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!”***

***27 Then the king gave his ruling: “Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.”***

***28 When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.***

What a great, though heart-breaking, story! It leaves me feeling that if I had only had a fraction of Solomon’s wisdom when bringing up our children, life would have been so much easier! Those moments when he said this and she said that and you don’t have a clue where the truth is or even where to start guessing!

Reading the story started me thinking – well what is wisdom exactly? Where does it come from and how do we use it? What do you think of when you hear the word wisdom? ….

~ maybe knowledge and experience with good judgement added in…

~ maybe something sensible and well thought through…

Perhaps you can think of someone you know, or know of, who seems to have great wisdom …. What makes them stand out?

~ maybe they seem to know a lot about a lot of things

~ maybe they use their knowledge well

~ is it maybe that they refer to God as to what to do and say?

Let’s delve back into Solomon’s history and see where his wisdom came from. Let’s see what makes him stand out among the people and especially the kings of Israel.

We need to go back a generation to Solomon’s father, David, to start to answer these questions. To a time when David had been leading the Israelites very successfully as king, winning battles and following God’s will and way for his people. But, as is so often the case with all of us, just as things seemed to be going really well, David, on the spur of the moment, made a wrong decision with terrible consequences. Adultery, murder and death were just some of the results…. It was anything but a wise decision. And whilst the outcomes might not be so awful, I’m sure we can all think of a time when a rash decision made years ago, changed the course of our lives. How amazing and what a relief that God doesn’t give up on us in those moments.

We won’t go into the details but, as a result of David’s actions, he ended up marrying Bathsheba who was pregnant with his child but their child died within 7 days of birth – a punishment from God for the wrong David had done. (2 Samuel 12:14). In time David and Bathsheba had other sons and we read in 2 Samuel 12:24 that they named one of them Solomon and that ‘the Lord loved him’.

What a wonderful start for Solomon – he was loved by the Lord! David had also said that Solomon would be the king of Israel when David died and God had promised that as long as David’s offspring kept God’s laws and commands and walked in His ways, there would always be a descendant of David on the throne of Israel. It seemed that things could only go well for Solomon and Israel.

In time David died and, after various false starts with other members of his family thinking they should be king, Solomon was crowned King of Israel (1 Kings 2:12) and his rule was firmly established (1 Kings 2:12 + 24). However, in only the very next verse we can read that Solomon married the daughter of the King of Egypt (as part of an alliance with the country) and straight away was offering sacrifices at high places instead of in the temple according to God’s commands. Both these things were against the way that God had said the Israelites should live – Solomon was sinning against the Lord. Even though we read that he loved the Lord and followed many of his ways, he still got it wrong.

And doesn’t this sound just like us today? We love God and we desperately want to follow Him in the way he leads us but sometimes … we still get things wrong - sometimes accidentally but on other occasions very deliberately. How amazing that God loves us so much that through Jesus’ death on the cross, He is still willing to forgive us if we are truly sorry and to work with us - broken, sinful humans – for His purpose and His glory.

So back to Solomon … just before the reading we had, there was a crucial moment in his life (1 Kings 3:5). Just when Solomon was making sacrifices in the wrong place, God appeared to Him in a dream. He said that Solomon could ask God for whatever he wanted God to give him. What a crazy offer! Just think what you might ask God for! However, rather than asking for the obvious things of riches or long life, Solomon asked to be able to carry out his duties as king effectively  and wisely (even though he was still very young) and with discernment and a knowledge of right and wrong. Perhaps he realised that already he was getting things wrong. What a great thing to ask for and how pleased God must have been to agree to his request. So pleased in fact that he gave him riches and honour as well!

And so, Solomon ruled with wisdom and discernment given by God and to this day is known as the wisest man who ever lived. We even speak about someone having ‘the wisdom of Solomon’. In his lifetime, God gave Israel peace from its enemies and Solomon finally built the temple in Jerusalem where the ark of the covenant would be placed and people could come to make sacrifices and worship God. He also wrote proverbs and songs; he taught about plants and animals and many came from far away to learn from him. He truly was blessed by God in the wisdom he gave him. Sadly, over time, Solomon continued to marry foreign women and be drawn to worship their gods and away from the one true God and eventually, the kingdom of Israel was split in two. But that is for another day.

In our reading we heard an example of Solomon’s wise judgement resulting in a good and right outcome in a sticky situation, bringing peace and justice to those involved. If you remember, both the mothers in the story claimed that the living baby was theirs but, in an era before the possibility of DNA testing, how could the truth be discovered and the baby given to the rightful mother. By suggesting that they had half a baby each, Solomon knew that the real mother would not want that to happen but would want to keep the baby alive at all costs even if it meant giving him to the other mother. And, of course, that is exactly what happened. A great example of Solomon using his God-given wisdom to bring truth, justice and peace of mind to a situation. What a blessing to the child and his mother.

But what about Solomon’s wisdom and what it says to us today? Many people in the world have amassed a great deal of knowledge in their lives and there is an assumption that they therefore must be wise. But history relates over and over that this is not necessarily the case. It is how the knowledge is used that will show someone to be wise – or not. The experiences we have in life will also influence how we make decisions but again, without wisdom, that influence may be very unhelpful and negative.

In Solomon, we see someone who loved the Lord and wanted to follow His way and even though he did get things wrong at times, God loved him and willingly gave him wisdom.

This is such blessing for us to know here at Stowe today. We, as Christians, love the Lord and know ourselves loved by Him, like Solomon. We therefore can trust that he will show us His way to go – the wise path – following the one who loves us more than life itself. So much, in fact, that He came to earth to die for us …. so surely following the risen Lord Jesus is the wisest thing to do.

And, as we follow Him, He will give us HIS wisdom to enable us to use our knowledge and life experiences to make wise, Godly decisions and to bring God’s truth, justice, peace, compassion and love into situations we find ourselves in. We too can act with ‘the wisdom of Solomon’ when we depend on God for the wisdom we need. Amen.