

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Rev. Samantha Evans

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Seeking Wisdom

For as long as I have been old enough to decide what to read and watch, I have been relentlessly drawn to fantasy literature, and oftentimes, most shamefully to the subgenre known as teen-paranormal romance. You may think, *Twilight* and *Vampire Diaries*, and you would be right. You may call it a guilty pleasure, but the truth is, I don't actually feel very guilty about it. You may also blame my youth, but the truth is, my mother shares this obsession, we are always calling the other when a new show on Netflix comes out. I don't think this is a phase I will grow out of.

Granted, some of these stories are better than others. Some have weird puritanical undertones or are a bit gruesome for my liking. But the fundamental narrative specifically in many vampire stories is that there exists within each being the ability to choose good or to choose evil. To use one's powers to heal or to destroy. To build up and protect their families and community or to tear it all down.

This is specific to the teen/young adult genre, probably because fantasy literature is often written for the purpose of moral formation for young people.

I am drawn to this particular genre, then, because in my heart of hearts I believe that each and every one of us has this ability to choose. Maybe we don't have super-human powers, but we do all have within us the ability to choose good or to choose evil. In small ways and in large. From every day minutiae to the ultimate life decisions.

Part of the drama in vampire stories is what happens when one chooses evil, how those around them react, how they themselves atone or double down on their betrayal. I love a good redemption story, so whenever the vampire repents from their bloodlust and relentless power grabs, when they show some tenderness and vulnerability and remorse, that's when we cry and cheer and regain our sense of hope for the world.

This may sound silly to y'all, but I love a good vampire hero, because they are never all good nor all bad. But they show us in a fantastical way this inner struggle that we all have, this inner choice we are given on a daily basis.

There is not one person who has ever lived who has been all good, not even King Solomon. But we fall into this trap, this fallacy, all the time.

We elevate someone to a status that is above or perfect, like an idol, and of course when they stumble, our world is shattered. We do this to ourselves as well. We overwork, overcompensate, put immense pressure on ourselves to be perfect, and then we beat ourselves up, believing that we are bad or deficient, anytime we get something wrong.

The truth, my friends, is that none of us are all good or all bad. None of us are perfect, complete, or finished products. We are all in process. All learning and growing. And each day we get to choose good or evil, to build up or tear down, to seek joy or languish in cynicism. Each day we get to choose.

I have to be honest: I don't really like King Solomon, and I definitely do not like this particular selection of verses from Scripture. You'll notice that I skipped a bunch of verses, which was not my choice, but the lectionary's. The missing verses are about all the people Solomon had killed or exiled in order to create this "firmly established kingdom."

He came to power through deceit and controversy, and he married a woman who worshipped a foreign god. He prayed at the high places, which is expressly prohibited in Deuteronomy. For these high places belonged to other gods. Ultimately, King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He built a lavish, over the top castle and temple. And after his reign, the nation of Israel fell apart and never reunited.

I am not really a fan of the Wise King Solomon. BUT, if I can come to love and have compassion for fictional vampires, surely, I can extend some love to good ole King Solomon.

And if we begin by acknowledging that none of us are all good nor all bad, not even King Solomon, then we can probably receive a really beautiful lesson from this encounter with Solomon and our God.

You see, the king was faced with a pretty significant challenge as he took the throne. He had enemies all around him, trying to destroy him and take the throne for themselves. He was coming into this position after THE King David, but his ascension was shrouded in controversy and bloodshed. And to top it all off, he was young, so there were likely lots of people around him with more experience in leadership who had it out for him or were just waiting for him to fail.

King Solomon was faced with a huge challenge, and a choice. He could choose to become a ruthless leader, who punished without impunity and ruled by force and

violence. Or he could choose the harder path. The path of curiosity and discernment, the path that is ambiguous, winding, not clearly marked, and requires a little patience and a lot of faith.

And on that day, King Solomon chose to seek wisdom, to ask God for a discerning mind, one that is programmed, wired to discern between good and evil. A mind that is capable of knowing what is good and capable of choosing that good.

Throughout his kingship, he did not always get it right. He did not always discern and choose what is good. And in that way, he models for us what it means to be human. To have a desire within us to choose good and to do good, and to realize that we don't always live into this desire. It's not always super straightforward and clear what is good. And it's not always easy to choose that good once we've discerned it.

Seeking wisdom and being wise isn't about reaching perfection, it's about approaching life with a sense of curiosity. It's about being okay with ambiguity. It's about being open to challenge, to acknowledging that we will always have work to do, things to learn, places to grow. We will make mistakes and make the wrong choice. And that's okay.

It's okay. Being wise means that we know that we are in process, not perfect, but still good. Still beloved. Still wonderfully and fearfully made.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, "Wisdom is not gained by knowing what is right. Wisdom is gained by practicing what is right, and noticing what happens when that practice succeeds and when it fails."¹

We see this often with children, who approach everything with curiosity and awe and a desire to discover something new. They experiment and test boundaries and learn from what works and what doesn't.

But at some point, our brains fall into established patterns, and we forget to wonder. We forget the value in exploring and questioning. We forget to pay attention to what happens when we choose particular paths.

My challenge to you all this day is to remember to wonder. To approach challenges and hard decisions from a place of curiosity. When you feel challenged by something or someone, ask yourself why. Be curious about any resistance you feel within yourself. What might you learn in this encounter, about yourself, about your loved

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*

ones and the one you're battling? Ask yourself what you might learn about God, what you might learn about what is good.

I have a friend whose adult children are working out some childhood stuff in therapy. And they went back to their mom to accuse her of messing them up. To which she said, "Ah, I wasn't that bad. Sure, I made some mistakes, but I gave y'all some stuff to work on. Wouldn't you be bored if you didn't anything to unpack?"

Please, please, please remember, my dear ones, that you will not under any circumstances perfect this discernment thing. You will not get it right all the time. You will not choose what is good all the time. And that's okay.

From my fictional vampire friends and our good buddy King Solomon, we learn that it's not possible to get it right all the time. But we might just happen upon some wisdom when we are led by a desire to discern and to choose what is good, as well as a willingness to learn and make amends when it all goes astray.

So whatever you are trying to discern this day, my friends, rest assured that whether you get it right or you are given an opportunity to learn something, through it all, we remain beloved children of the Most High. God will never stop rooting for us. God is there to cheer us on when we get it right and guide us back when we get it wrong.

Let us receive this gift of grace and extend it to ourselves and those around us. For this will lead us to wisdom. It will lead us to God. It will lead us to whom God calls and has created us to be.

In the name of our Triune God, who creates, sustains, and redeems us all. Amen.