

Year B Sunday 18th August 2024 – Evensong at St. Peter’s Cathedral

Thirteenth after Pentecost

‘Justice, Righteousness, & Wisdom’

Introduction

Ever had the thought that we are all shareholders in the kingdom of God? Once we have reached the awareness that God comes looking for us when we perhaps thought that we were looking for God, then it dawns that obeying God’s first commandment is the biggest investment we could possibly make. King Solomon of Judah and, centuries later, the writer of the letter to the Ephesians knew the spiritual dividends which flowed from loving the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.

‘Justice, Righteousness, and Wisdom’

By

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I Kings 3:15-28; Psalm 34:9-18; Ephesians 6:1-9

Introduction

Last Thursday evening, this Cathedral witnessed a significant and, indeed, sparkling service in the life of our diocese: the consecration of Archdeacon Sophie Relf-Christopher as bishop. We shall know her as an Assistant Bishop in the diocese.

Some of the many clergy gathered for the service, had an early dinner together beforehand at the hotel across the road. At the table for seven at which I sat, were parish priests and school chaplains. The lively conversation turned to what parishes were doing to alleviate the key markers of poverty that we see, for example, the higher than usual incidence of homelessness and hunger. Then the school chaplains added another kind of poverty that they saw among their young people. The key markers of this poverty were anxiety and isolation.

There to the table were brought the evidence of witnesses to adult financial impoverishment and the social impoverishment of young people. Not all doom and gloom, however, as we heard about a young immigrant couple from a communist-ruled country who saw a parish group on an outside working-bee, wanted to join in, to know more about these people, and then the church. Chaplains were engaged in helping young people to connect with each other and were fostering belonging. Love made visible.

God seems to begin relating to us by showing us love in some way. Maybe, before we can name it, we see God’s love in the life and beauty of the world around us. Usually, we experience it through the love shown to us by our parents, grandparents, extended family, and friends of our family in an ever-widening circle. We learn to recognise the large and small ways which show God’s love for us and to recognise when it seems to be lacking. Both forms of awareness can be indicators of God seeking us out. God draws us to that line in the sand: commit to God and see God’s love in all that gives life to our world, or not. We’re drawn to commitment, to invest our very selves. The love we have for God, a love which desires to give our best in serving according to God’s will, is returned to us with generous dividends. The readings this evening show us in different ways how wisdom and judgement

used in a loving spirit enable the unity, the connectedness, which sustains life and health.

I Kings 3

In the first book of Kings is the record of how Solomon, the son of King David and Bathsheba, succeeded to the throne of Judah and established his kingship securely. Solomon planned the building of his own house and the house of the Lord – Solomon’s Temple – in Jerusalem, and the wall around Jerusalem. Until these were finished, however, Solomon and the people continued to offer their sacrifices to God at the high places. A principal high place was Gibeon and Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. Unsurprisingly, Solomon would stay there and one night God appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Ask what I should give you.” Solomon answered, “... your servant is in the midst of the people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil: for who can govern this your great people?” “It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this ...’ and had not asked for himself long life or riches, or the life of his enemies. God and Solomon made vows of commitment, creating a personal covenant between them. When Solomon awoke, he stood before the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem and again offered burnt offerings but also offerings of well-being to the Lord. Then Solomon provided a feast for all his servants. God chose Solomon to rule and judge the people of Israel giving him not only the wisdom for which he had asked, but long life and riches, too.

Solomon’s wisdom was tested, and we heard about a particular case brought before him for judgement. The plaintiff was a new mother, a prostitute, whose baby son had been taken from beside her while she slept in bed at night. Another woman in the house was also a new mother and a prostitute. This woman’s baby son died when she rolled on him in the night. Since both mothers were prostitutes, they had no husbands and were alone together. There were no witnesses. It was a case of one person’s word against another’s.

Justice is done for the mother who regains her lost, living son, and justice is done for the baby who will be nursed and reared by his loving mother. With the sword in Solomon’s hand to cut the baby in two and kill him, the mother said, “Give her the living boy, do not kill him”, but the other said, “It shall be neither mine nor yours: divide it.” With few exceptions, a mother loves sacrificially. The words of the second woman showed that she felt dispossessed by the death of her son and saw the living baby boy as an

object to possess. Children are not possessions to be objectified any more than adults. Dividing our bodies results in death. A whole person has life but needs love and nurture to become fully grown. Love and nurture are given in our relationships.

Ephesians 6:1-9

Today, we may often be ‘objectified’ in numbers for the purpose of scientific discovery. We can live with that when we see benefits arising from statistical analysis. However, many of us are affronted when we are so reduced in, for example, a workplace or other kind of organisation.

The writer of Ephesians is clear that God relates to us with His commitment to show us generous, impartial, and very particular love. He is also clear that we are to show our commitment of loving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by keeping the first commandment.

Conclusion

No matter what our circumstances may be, this spiritual investment is our most rewarding. Knowing we are loved by God and loving God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength enables us to act with the agency and dignity of whole persons in service to Christ.