

"SOLOMON - A SYMBOL OF OUR TIME"

INTRODUCTION

It's interesting to note that when Jesus wanted a word picture to describe the rich splendor of the flowers of Galilee, he stretched back across seven centuries to recall a name that was familiar to all of his listeners. "Even Solomon" he said, "in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these".

And when we, in the 20th century, want a person - a Biblical personality - who portrays power and prosperity, ~~wealth and wisdom~~, we would find it difficult to find a more fitting symbol than this royal, regal man who ruled over Israel at the height of its glory. In a number of ways, Solomon is a symbol of our time and our nation.

DEVELOPMENT

Who was this man that Jesus hailed as an emblem of elegance? How much do we remember about him from our days in Sunday School? For one thing, we recall that he was King David's son and that he built a reputation for wisdom and wealth. We also remember that it was Solomon who constructed the great Temple in Jerusalem. But from there on our recollections begin to fade into the foggy impression that somehow Solomon never fulfilled the promise of his privilege and ability.

Certain it is that no ruler ever began his term of office under more auspicious circumstances than did Solomon. We read in the book of Kings that his father, David, gave him his blessing and said to him:

"Be strong in the Lord and show yourself a man,
and keep the charge of the Lord, your God. Walk
in his ways and keep his commandments."

The Kingdom of Israel that he inherited was quite extensive in miles. There were no ~~internal or external~~ problems in the land. Peace prevailed. And it's also interesting to note that Solomon began his reign in prayerful partnership with God. The prayer which he offered was repeated by a President of our own land upon his sudden induction into the responsibilities of high office:

"I am but a little child. Give thy servant there-
fore an understanding mind to govern thy people,
that I may discern between good and evil".

And it would seem that Solomon's prayer for an "understanding mind" was answered for word soon spread far and wide about his great wisdom. Even the Queen of Sheba heard about it and had to come and see for herself. ~~And after she had heard about it, she was convinced.~~ "Your wisdom and your prosperity surpass the report I have heard" she said to King Solomon. And of course, Solomon's claim to fame rest not alone on his great wisdom for it was he who master-minded the building of that magnificent Temple in Jerusalem that was for centuries the focal point of the Jewish faith.

The early chapters in his life's story suggest to us a man who was destined for greatness for he did possess a great mind, a great soul, and inherited great wealth. But somewhere along the line he slipped up and that potential for greatness was never completely realized. You begin to feel and sense this as you read along through the narrative in the book of Kings. You

feel him losing his footing. For instance, in referring to the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, it says:

"He was seven years in building the Temple of the Lord, but he was thirteen years in building his own house".

The story of his later years is pretty much a study in sensuality and selfishness. Luxury and the gratification of his sensual appetites became his chief aim. The climax comes when Solomon became so accomodating in his religious views that the object of his worship was determined by the fancy of his particular wife of the moment. He started with one of the most promising and privileged beginnings on record, but something happened along the way and his story ends in the misty flats of comfort, compromise and conformity.

WISDOM There are two reasons why I suggest that Solomon is a symbol of our time. First, he possessed great wisdom.

He was the possessor of an understanding mind and apparently he used it to probe deeper and ush further than any man up to that point. The Temple in Jerusalem that he designed was a significant engineering feat for that time. It was superior to anything Israel had ever seen. So were his palace and his throne.

And moreover he was wise in his dealings with people - that rare and brilliant combination of scholar, psychologist, diplomat and sociologist. You may remember how he solved the riddle of the two women who both claimed to be mother of the same child. "Cut the child in half; give half to each mother". "No" screamed one mother. "All right" said the other. And the child was given to the mother who screamed "no".

We, too, live in a time that possesses great wisdom. We, too, have probed deeper and pushed further into the mystery of life and the universe that is our home than any other generation before us. The advances in the field of knowledge have been breath-taking and they continue.

OUT [Perhaps you've heard the story about the two six year old children. "Do you think" said one of them, "That these thermomuclear projectilëss will pierce the heat barrier?" "No" said the other, "I don't...because once the force enters the stratosphere..." But then they were interrupted in their conversation by the rining of the school bell. "Gee...too bad...now we've got to go in and string beads".

love But knowledge, my friends, will not save us any more than it saved King Solomon. We can travel faster, but what good does it do if we don't know where we're going. Or, we can conquer space, but what good will it do if we cannot conquer human sin and selfishness. Our world needs light, but it also needs warmth - compassion, understanding. "~~It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh~~". Those words inscribed on the wall of the lobby of the RCA Building here in our own city come to mind:

"Man's ultimate destiny depends not on whether he can learn new lessons or make new discoveries and conquests, but on his acceptance of the lessons taught him close upon two thousand years ago".

WEALTH A second reason why Solomon is a symbol of our time is because he was the possessor of great wealth. And so are we. What a contrast between the early days of his life and the early days of his father's life. Austerity and discipline marked David's early years. He was a farmer's son. Solomon was brought up in the palace with all that money could buy. His reign was a peaceful one - no wars, no famine. He could concentrate on the building of more stately mansions for himself and for God. Perhaps David made the common mistake of giving Solomon too many of the things he had never had as a boy.

We, too, are a privileged people, living in a prosperous land, in a world in which hunger and poverty have become dominating issues and on the solution of which the future of mankind depends. Three-quarters of the human race lives in a state of poverty bordering on or below the subsistence level. Dr. Henry Smith Leiper, former Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, brought our world into brilliant focus in his study of an imaginary city of 1,000 people representing the entire world. I've shared this with you before. Let me do it again.

If, in our imagination we might compress the total population of our world, now more than three billion persons, into a community of 1,000 persons living in a single town, this is how it would look:

"Sixty persons would represent the present US population; the rest of the world would be represented by 940 persons. The 60 Americans would be receiving half of the total income of the community; the 940 other persons would share the re-remaining half.

The 60 Americans would have 15 times as many possessions per person as all the rest of the people. The Americans would produce 16% of the world food supply, yet would eat 72% above the minimum food requirements of the rest of the world. Most of the non-American people in this imaginary compressed community would be ignorant, poor, hungry and sick. Half of them would be unable to read or write."

There's more to it, but that is the meat of it. It has been said that "to whom much is given, much is expected." And those of us who have been privileged to be brought up in this land, in the midst of this affluent society have been richly blessed. ~~We take it for granted. We need to be far more concerned and agitated and active on behalf of the bare nets of our world.~~

A LOOK AT OURSELVES

I think we need, on occasion, to look at ourselves in light of all this.

We approach that time of the year when your Church asks you to review and re-examine your giving to the work of Christ in the world. It's not just a matter of making a budget; it's also a matter of what is happening to us.

It's tied in with our values, with how much we care, and how deeply concerned we are for others. Like Solomon of old, we have been given much. We have inherited much. Now the question that we shall be facing is: how much are we willing to give? How much do we care? This is the question that comes

home to us as we conduct the financial canvass of our parish. It comes to us in those various budget items, for behind all of the facts and figures we hear there is that simple question: "who cares". Like Solomon, we've gotten off to a fine start, a good beginning...inherited some blessings from the past, from those who have gone this way in other days. Do we care, each of us, care enough to stay with this spiritual adventure - to build, to expand. But if we are to press forward and climb to greater heights, we shall need your help. But such is the nature of Christianity that when we truly put our hands and hearts to any challenging task, new power comes and we grow bigger and stronger in the doing of it. What we make, makes us!

CLOSING I close with a story about a congregation back in frontier days in this land and the building of their Church. It was a Church built by the side of a river and the logs for it were hauled to the river's edge and then a work bee scheduled. 40 or more men responded along with their wives for a day's work. There was no machinery for lifting the heavy logs. Muscle strength did it. While the women chatted and prepared the meals, the men worked together and log after log was lifted out of the river and set in place.

Finally they came to the last log - the log that was to be set on top as the binder. It was a log some 70 to 80 feet in length - thick and heavy. Tired.

Every man present got down in the muddy river. The foreman offered instructions. "On the count of one, lift it up to your knees. On the count of two - up to the waist. Three - up to the shoulders and walk it out over to the church. On four - over your hands and place it into position".

And so they started. "One" - up to the knees. "Two" - up to the waist. "Three" to the shoulders and out of the River. "Four" - over their heads. And then it began to waver, sway, totter. To drop it meant some would be hurt, crushed. "Hold it" shouted the foreman. And quickly he called to the women who were standing and watching, to the young boys watching their fathers. They got under it with their weight, some with their hands under the elbows of sons and husbands and then all together - they lifted that heavy log into place.

CONCLUSION Give us a Church like that here! And no matter what the task: Fair, Sunday School, choir, outreach, world hunger, conference apportionments, church building - with every back under the load, with every member and friend doing his or her part, having a share, with every hand and heart lifting and praying - there is no victory that we cannot win, no task which under God we cannot accomplish.

I believe it. I believe we can do it here. And in so doing, we shall grow stronger. We are building a great Church - great in service, in spirit, in influence. We have here a history of which to be proud, but also a future to be envied. To whom much is given, much also is expected. God grant that in the days ahead we may have the "wisdom" to share our "wealth" that all of this may come to pass!

PRAYER Bless, O Lord, that which in Your name we attempt to do in this Church in the days ahead. Thou art the giver of all good things, grant that we may use our gifts wisely - to Your glory. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, October 30, 1977

GREETING I would take this moment to greet the visitors in the congregation. We're so pleased to have you with us, and we hope the opportunity will be ours to greet you in a more personal way following the service - either at the door as you depart, or perhaps downstairs in the Community Room where tea and coffee will be served. Please be free in the sharing of your name. Sign one of our Guest Books and join us on other Sundays in worship and fellowship.

I might add that you worship in a Church that has been ministering to the needs of people in this city since 1837. It is a House of Worship for all people, and all who would worship with us in peace and pray with us in a spirit of Christian love are most welcome here in this House of God.

CONCERNS Several concerns that I would put before you. You would want to know that Meriel West is a patient in Metropolitan Hospital. Meriel broke a bone in her upper leg and will be side-lined for about three months. Our prayers reach out to include her and also Ruth Frame who is convalescing with friends in Madison, New Jersey.

Today is the last Sunday for Mr. and Mrs. Michael Barton and son, Jason. They move to Hillsdale, New Jersey this week and we hate to see them go, but wish them well in their new home in the suburbs. Mike is the Chief Administrator at Flower-Fifth Hospital here in the community and we hope we won't leave contact altogether.

Members of the Adult Fellowship are resting in the afterglow of a successful Halloween party held here last night. I understand that first prize for the best costume went to Juanita and Ken Guise.... also members of the AF are reminded of the brunch scheduled for today at the Cockeyed Clan.

FINANCIAL CANVASS We approach the month of November - always a very busy month in our church...three major activities taking place: Church Fair, Saturday, the 19th. Reception of New Members, November 20th. And Dedication Sunday, November 13th.

Dedication Sunday - the Sunday when we present pledges of financial support - brings the Financial Canvass to mind. This is conducted by our Finance Committee and present today to tell you about next year's budget and our plans for raising funds iz the steady and faithful, dependable Chairman of our Finance Committee. Trustee of the Church and an active member here for 10 years - Edward Brown.

JESUS SAID: "It is more blessed to give than to receive".

Workshop
11-3
SAT

Comfort the bereaved and the broken-hearted among us.

(10/30/77)

INTRODUCTION The week of toil has ended. The day of rest is at hand.

May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. May it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence. In silence, let each pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION We rest our hearts in the Promise of Him who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and my burden is light".

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart. We dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength".

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to His purpose".

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments".

PRAYERS O Thou who hearest prayer, hear our prayers - for others as well as for ourselves.

Thou who art the source of all peace and power, all hope and healing, touch with thy healing power those whom we mention in our prayers this day. We call to mind and mention by name: Ruth Frame, Meriel West, Dorothy Clarendon - cherished members and friends of this congregation.

Answer the unspoken prayers offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, prayers spoken in the name of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray:

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen"

The editorial page of today's NY Times carries the partial text of remarks made by Senator Hubert Humphrey to the Senate in recent days. Called "A Moment of Sentiment", there are several beautiful lines that bring tears to the eyes. One line which caught my eye as I read it this morning was this:

"It is not a question of whether we can pile up more wealth; it is a question of whether we can live together".