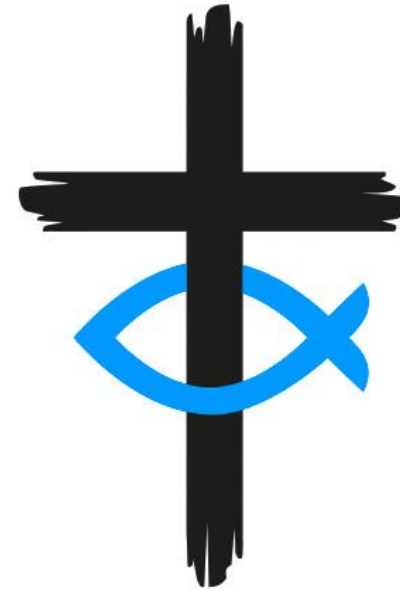


# Daily Devotions from the URC

1<sup>st</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> December

Solomon



## Introduction

We continue our read through the Saul-David-Solomon saga and look at the end of David's reign and the accession of Solomon – the supposedly wise king who enslaved his people

*Andy Braunston*

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### [Saturday 1st December David Ails](#)

The Rev’d Sarah Moore is President of the URC in Cumbria and a member of Carver Uniting Church

1 Kings 1: 1 - 8

When King David was very old, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. So his attendants said to him, “Let us look for a young virgin to serve the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm.” Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful young woman and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The woman was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but

the king had no sexual relations with her. Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him. (His father had never rebuked him by asking, "Why do you behave as you do?" He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom.) Adonijah conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they gave him their support. But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei and Rei and David's special guard did not join Adonijah.

### Reflection

A friend of mine, upon hearing about this story, commented that this is the passage that Religious Studies teachers should use to attract the average teenage boys' interest in the Bible. My friend was assuming that the average teenage boy would be interested in the idea of a beautiful young girl being employed to keep an elderly king warm at night. Here we have the little-told story of Abishag the Shunammite, or as I think of her, Abishag the human blanket.

1 Kings does not wish us to dwell on Abishag's story as the second part of the story suggests. Next Adonijah, one of David's sons, attempts to proclaim himself as king.

But this is to detract from the story of Abishag. I don't suppose Abishag got to choose whether or not she wished to serve her king in this way. Perhaps as we are told David did not have sexual relations with her we are meant to assume that this was easy work. It seems unlikely considering David's track record that he didn't want to have such a relationship with Abishag.

I suspect that here we have a young girl who yes, made her king's last days and weeks a little more comfortable, but who, herself, paid a high price for that. I imagine that she was groped regularly and wasn't required to wear very much in order to give maximum impact in her task of keeping the king warm. I wonder too why none of David's wives were willing (or asked) to take on this role?

As we enter the season of Christmas parties I wonder who the Abishags are of our day? Who is told that if they offer the boss a favour of some form that

would go well for them? Who has no choice than to offer personal favours that they'd rather not? Who is told to 'get on with it' for "it's not so bad"?

#MeToo

God of the vulnerable,  
we pray for people  
who are persuaded  
to do 'work' that demeans them.

We remember those  
for whom sex work  
is a Hobson's Choice  
and they feel that  
they have no option.  
Forgive us  
as we  
kid ourselves  
that such a life is chosen.

We pray for those  
who work with abused people.  
Who bring perpetrators to justice.  
Who help individuals rebuild their lives.  
Amen.

[Sunday 2nd December PSALM 75 Advent 1](#)

The Rev'd Lena Talbot. Retired Minister of the Lancashire Missional Partnership

We give you thanks, O God,  
because your name is near.  
All speak of your majestic deeds;  
your voice we also hear:

"I choose the appointed time;  
I judge with justice sure.  
When earth and all its people quake,  
its pillars I secure.

accepted the challenge, so too we can be ready for whatever surprises are in store this Advent - and at any other time God chooses. We are not just talking about random acts of kindness but about radical, life changing, encounters that can shape our own destiny and the lives of people around us. Often that happens in the most unlikely and unexpected of places.

And so "Jeroboam promptly fled to Egypt to King Shishak of Egypt and remained in Egypt until the death of Solomon" when it was safe for him to return and claim the Kingdom. Doesn't that also sound a familiar turn in the story at this time of year when another refugee had to flee from the wrath of a ruler?

The plot thickens once again.

Loving God help us to be ready for whatever surprises and challenges you have in store for us this Advent.  
May we be ready to stop and listen  
to the most unlikely people in the most unlikely places.

As the plot of our own lives, the country's life, and the life of the world thickens and thickens again be with us all  
and give us the wisdom and the hope to do your will. Amen

walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, as his father David did. Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom away from him but will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of my servant David whom I chose and who did keep my commandments and my statutes; but I will take the kingdom away from his son and give it to you—that is, the ten tribes. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, so that my servant David may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires; you shall be king over Israel. If you will listen to all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. For this reason I will punish the descendants of David, but not for ever.’ Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam; but Jeroboam promptly fled to Egypt, to King Shishak of Egypt, and remained in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

#### Reflection

The plot thickens

The warning given to Solomon was crystal clear. If you stay on track then the Temple will be hallowed and the succession is secure. If not then the House, the Temple and the Dynasty will fall. Actions have consequences. And here is the unfolding of that warning.

Jeroboam is an outsider and the son of a servant and a widow and yet he is handed four fifths of the kingdom on a plate. This is not a whim, flagrant ambition, nor pride but it is the promise of God after the king’s unfaithfulness. Rehoboam, lacking his father’s wisdom, listens to the wrong people, made disastrous choices, and so the Kingdom is divided. The unthinkable has happened. In a few short years we have travelled from the pinnacle of achievement to the break down of all that is familiar. The account has twisted and squirmed. Modern soap operas have nothing on the Hebrew Scriptures’ plots and outcomes.

As we approach Christmas the chances of being stopped on the road by a passing prophet and handed a random gift of most of the kingdom are, thankfully, fairly remote. After all, what would we do with it? Just as Jeroboam

“ ‘Boast not!’ I tell the proud;  
the wicked I address:  
“Do not lift up your heads with pride,  
or speak with haughtiness’.”

No one in all the earth  
can truly give renown.  
God is the judge; he raises one  
and puts another down.

The LORD’s hand holds a cup  
with wine of powerful blend;  
He pours it out, and wicked ones  
must drink it to the end.

God’s works I will proclaim,  
and Jacob’s God I’ll praise.  
The wicked’s strength I will destroy;  
the righteous I will raise.

#### Reflection

This start of the Church’s Year. Advent – a time of preparation, reflection and waiting. A time when my thoughts usually turn to Luke’s gospel – to Mary in her eighth month of pregnancy – probably preparing for a long journey to Bethlehem, knowing her baby will be born away from home. Mary reflecting on how she came to be in this situation as she waits for the birth of the Son of God. Mary is on the threshold.

At Advent we are a bit like Mary, we are on the threshold of Christmas. I was brought to this thinking a few years ago on a retreat day where we were encouraged to think about thresholds. We are on the threshold of the here and now, we look back to the past and look forward to the future. So appropriate for this time of Advent.

We remember the Mary of Luke’s gospel, a young woman, on the threshold of motherhood, meeting Elizabeth and her wonderful song of praise. Is the writer of Psalm 75 on the threshold of something new? Some new revelation?

Certainly, the Magnificat is reminiscent of this Psalm. In Psalm 75 we have something of the majesty of God, something of the wicked being destroyed and the righteous being lifted up, something that Mary remembered in her song of praise with Elisabeth. And something that could stay with us at this time of Advent.

#### Prayer

Lord God of thresholds,  
Help us, to take time to reflect and pray this Christmas time  
Help us, like the Psalmist to see your majesty in the hustle and bustle of it all  
Help us, in the looking forward not to miss out  
on the peace that is our gift from you  
Help us to remember the words of St. Paul so that we don't worry about  
anything but pray about everything and remember to say Thank You. Amen

#### [Monday 3rd December Another Attempted Coup?](#)

The Rev'd Gwen Collins, member of Avenue St Andrews URC, retired minister

#### I Kings 1: 9-31

Adonijah then sacrificed sheep, cattle and fattened calves at the Stone of Zohelath near En Rogel. He invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the special guard or his brother Solomon.

Then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king, and our lord David knows nothing about it? Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go in to King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: "Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and add my word to what you have said." So Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. Bathsheba bowed down, prostrating herself before the king. "What is it you want?" the king asked. She said to him, "My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the Lord your God: 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my

God wants the best for the world. God created everything, and everyone, and calls us to be followers and believers. It isn't a one way relationship: we have to respond to God's call, we have to seek to learn more about God and grow in faith, we have to make an effort.

In relationships we are called to be faithful and commit. What turns our head? What takes us away from faithful and true relationships and from following Jesus?

Today, we give you thanks, gracious God,  
for positive relationships that we have had;  
for faithful relationships that have encouraged us, built us up,  
and brought us happiness.  
As we remember, we are reminded that relationships require effort and commitment; may we seek to be true and authentic and recommit ourselves to you, the God of love, who calls us and never lets us go. Amen.

#### [Saturday 15th December The Lord's judgement](#)

The Rev'd Carole Elphick is a Retired Minister and is a member at Muswell Hill.

#### 1 Kings 11: 26 - 40

Jeroboam son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, rebelled against the king. The following was the reason he rebelled against the king. Solomon built the Millo, and closed up the gap in the wall of the city of his father David. The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charge over all the forced labour of the house of Joseph. About that time, when Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Ahijah had clothed himself with a new garment. The two of them were alone in the open country when Ahijah laid hold of the new garment he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. He then said to Jeroboam: Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'See, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and will give you ten tribes. One tribe will remain his, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. This is because he has forsaken me, worshipped Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and has not

what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not completely follow the Lord, as his father David had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods.

Then the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this matter, that he should not follow other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of your father David I will not do it in your lifetime; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. I will not, however, tear away the entire kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.'

#### Reflection

What is marriage? It is a covenant relationship, it is a promise to love, cherish, work through problems and stick together until one of you dies. This is what we aim for when, and if, we get married. At its best, marriage is a fair and equal partnership, a union blessed by God, where both parties commit to one another, try to live well together, building each other up, encouraging the other, supporting and loving one's spouse.

It doesn't always work out that way; sometimes one partner changes and the other doesn't; sometimes one struggles and the other cannot, or will not, cope with it, sometimes the power balance shifts and, instead of an equal partnership, it becomes a destructive relationship and abuse - either physical or emotional - occurs. The thing about any faithful, committed relationship is that it requires effort; it is equal, positive and both work at it.

Solomon's marriages make our efforts look quite tame. Imagine trying to even remember all the names of so many women!! The issue was that the women Solomon surrounded himself with turned his head, distracted him and took him away from his calling to be a faithful follower of God and so he lost sight of his own faith.

throne.' But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it. He has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and has invited all the king's sons, Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant. My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his ancestors, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals."

While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived. And the king was told, "Nathan the prophet is here." So he went before the king and bowed with his face to the ground. Nathan said, "Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you, and that he will sit on your throne? Today he has gone down and sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep. He has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest. Right now they are eating and drinking with him and saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' But me your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he did not invite. Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"

Then King David said, "Call in Bathsheba." So she came into the king's presence and stood before him. The king then took an oath: "As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place." Then Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground, prostrating herself before the king, and said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

#### Reflection

This is a story of intrigue and manoeuvring for power.

Strong characters inhabit this text. Adonijah, never challenged by his father (as we read on Saturday) is David's eldest surviving son and very handsome. He is thought to be the king-in-waiting by almost everyone who counts. They accept his invitation to an inaugural feast. Nathan the prophet disagrees and takes the initiative to scupper Adonijah's succession attempt. He recruits Bathsheba as a willing ally. Solomon, interestingly, does not plead his case in person, nor is his

opinion sought or stated. David is a very old man but still holds the reins of power, and it is his decision which holds sway.

How did the writers and editors of the book of Kings intend us to read this episode? I think the lesson they probably intended is along the lines of, “Do what you will humanly speaking, but God’s purpose will out.” But the attempts to secure power, not only by Adonijah but also by Nathan on behalf of Solomon, leave a nasty taste in my mouth. Then, as now, it is profoundly sad when a nation, a business, a family, or a church, are structured in such a way that people feel they have to vie for power and do others down in the process.

This being the season of Advent my mind turns to Matthew’s genealogy which spells out for us that David’s true successor, twenty eight generations down the line, lived differently. In all the Gospels Jesus emanates power, but never seeks it!

May our Advent journey strengthen that same characteristic in us as individual disciples and as church communities. May God’s Spirit sensitise us to any tendencies we have towards intrigue or manoeuvring for power, and cleanse us from it.

Prayer

For the sake of your world, Lord,  
strengthen your church in true humility and service.

Root out from within us  
all hunger for power which lifts us up and damages others.

Empower us to live differently  
in all spheres of life, from politics through to family relationships.

May your kingdom come.  
Amen

our imaginations (partly based on legends developed within all Abrahamic faiths). Think of the portrayals of the queen by Betty Blythe, Gina Lollobrigida or Halle Berry – a conversation and trade mission becoming an erotic tale of intrigue involving stereotypically beautiful men and women. The voice of the Queen of Sheba – whoever she represents – silenced.

How readily fact becomes embellished and how quickly legend gets absorbed then retold as truth.

As I am writing discussion boards, blogs, facebook groups and reviews are reverberating with the outpouring of #metoo stories and the waves of hurt and pain rippling out. Many people talking of a rekindling of their own hurt as the Ford and Kavanaugh hearings play out in the media. Let’s listen and pray.

Listening and affirming God  
may we be more like you.

May we be part of a safe place where people can share their story and feel heard and affirmed.

May we hold the space and always start from a premise of belief.

May we find ways to articulate your invitation and welcome to a community built on justice, love and integrity. Amen

[Friday 14th December Solomon’s Errors](#)

The Rev’d Jenny Mills, Minister Newport Pagnell & West End Wolverton URCs and Convenor of the Children’s and Youth Work Committee.

1 Kings 11: 1 - 13

King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the Israelites, ‘You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you; for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods;’ Solomon clung to these in love. Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did



accomplishments and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. Not even half had been told me; your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard. Happy are your wives! Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness.’ Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones; never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

Moreover, the fleet of Hiram, which carried gold from Ophir, brought from Ophir a great quantity of almug wood and precious stones. From the almug wood the king made supports for the house of the Lord, and for the king’s house, lyres also and harps for the singers; no such almug wood has come or been seen to this day.

Meanwhile, King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed, as well as what he gave her out of Solomon’s royal bounty. Then she returned to her own land, with her servants.

#### Reflection

Seldom, it seems, has a woman, about whom we know so little, caught the imaginations of so many. If we pare back the myths that have grown up around her we have left a core of information which is, nonetheless, very significant.

She is a woman of some personal resource whether a queen in her own right or an emissary. We see her tackling the, circa, 5 month journey from her presumed home in present day Yemen to Jerusalem. Her caravan appears to have arrived unscathed suggesting an ability in leadership. We see her engaging with Solomon in an exchange which we can interpret as trade negotiations and we recognise her ability not only to assess Solomon’s wisdom but also to recognise God’s influence.

In those few sentences I find a woman whom I would be proud to emulate. However, I need to dispense with the media influences on my picture. I doubt that any chamber orchestra will ever announce my arrival as per Handel and I challenge the images and behaviours with which Hollywood has peppered

#### Tuesday 4th December Solomon proclaimed King

The Rev’d Colin Hunt, retired minister worshipping at Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

1 Kings 1: 38 - 53

So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon mount King David’s mule, and they escorted him to Gihon. Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, “Long live King Solomon!” And all the people went up after him, playing pipes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound.

Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they were finishing their feast. On hearing the sound of the trumpet, Joab asked, “What’s the meaning of all the noise in the city?” Even as he was speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. Adonijah said, “Come in. A worthy man like you must be bringing good news.” “Not at all!” Jonathan answered. “Our lord King David has made Solomon king. The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites, and they have put him on the king’s mule, and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon. From there they have gone up cheering, and the city resounds with it. That’s the noise you hear. Moreover, Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne. Also, the royal officials have come to congratulate our lord King David, saying, ‘May your God make Solomon’s name more famous than yours and his throne greater than yours!’ And the king bowed in worship on his bed and said, ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has allowed my eyes to see a successor on my throne today.’”

At this, all Adonijah’s guests rose in alarm and dispersed. But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. Then Solomon was told, “Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and is clinging to the horns of the altar. He says, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.’” Solomon replied, “If he shows himself to be worthy, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die.” Then King Solomon sent men, and they brought him down from the altar.

And Adonijah came and bowed down to King Solomon, and Solomon said, “Go to your home.”

#### Reflection

So what do we learn from this passage? Men (and women) of true faith do not hold grudges against anyone. There is respect for differing views yet making it clear what our own views might be on a given subject and that includes matters of faith. The mention of Zadok the priest reminds us today of some of the music of our own Queen's coronation in 1952, originally composed by Handel for the coronation of George II in 1727, and played at every coronation since. At the time of our Queen's coronation, being just 12 years old, I found the new television presentation somewhat boring, but later came to love those choral anthems. Just as the royal officials in today's reading were honouring their new king, Solomon, so in the Twentieth Century the same kind of thing was taking place at Westminster Abbey as politicians and peers paid homage to our new sovereign.

The principal difference between these two scenarios is that our Queen does not hold the right to condemn people to death if they do not please her. We learn from the media that in some parts of the world there is a real risk of harm if the 'party line' is not adhered to. Solomon's attitude towards Adonijah reminds me of that of Nelson Mandela after he became the President of South Africa. He could just as easily have pursued and persecuted those who had imprisoned him, but he didn't. Instead he focussed on improving the lot of black South Africans.

That leaves us with a challenge concerning our own attitudes. How we respond to other people or situations should, I hope, reflect our faith in Jesus. We recall His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, how would we handle that kind of situation? Positively I hope!

#### Prayer

Wise and wonderful God, so often we think we know best. Sooner or later we realise that Your wisdom is far greater and beyond our wildest imagination. Open our hearts and minds that our first desire is to follow your way. Make us sensitive to the needs of others no matter what their circumstances so that

Actions have consequences for people today. We are constantly learning costly lessons. In many ways our world has become like the Temple of Solomon. Many parts of the world have “become a heap of ruins” and people do say “Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land?” But I do not believe it is the Lord that has done this.

Telling a lie, carrying a knife onto the street, robbery, mindless violence and, yes, not keeping the commandments of God, are all actions that have consequences; they are our actions and we have to face the consequences.

#### Prayer

It is hard to see places and people's lives in ruins, often through no fault of their own. It's hard not to feel helpless and hopeless in the face of all the insecurity and fear around us. But our hope remains in you, God. We remember when Jesus walked into the trap that was laid for him, when he was humiliated and murdered, then those actions too had consequences. Thank God! Praise be! Amen

[Thursday 13th December The Queen of Sheba.](#)

The Rev'd Helen M Mee, temporary Transition Minister for Synod of Scotland and member of Morningside United Church

1 Kings 10: 1 - 13

When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, (fame due to[a] the name of the Lord), she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. When the queen of Sheba had observed all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his valets, and his burnt-offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her.

So she said to the king, ‘The report was true that I heard in my own land of your

### Wednesday 12th December God appears to Solomon

Fredwyn Hosier is a pastoral Consultant in Thames North Synod and member of Palmers Green URC

#### 1 Kings 9: 1 - 9

When Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build, the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The Lord said to him, 'I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you made before me; I have consecrated this house that you have built, and put my name there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. As for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel for ever, as I promised your father David, saying, "There shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel."

'If you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. This house will become a heap of ruins; everyone passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, "Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this house?" Then they will say, "Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their ancestors out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, worshipping them and serving them; therefore the Lord has brought this disaster upon them."

#### Reflection

This is a huge bargain that the Lord is offering to Solomon. The Lord is saying that if Solomon is faithful to him and keeps his commandments he will consecrate the Temple for all time. The continuance, however, is conditional on maintaining the worship of God there and not turning away to worship other gods. Actions have consequences. No one is too grand, high-powered, or magnificent to escape the consequences of wrong doing. Solomon and his family will come to learn that costly lesson as history unfolds.

Your care and love is freely shared among all nations and communities throughout the world, in Jesus name. Amen

### Wednesday 5th December David settles old scores

The Rev'd Ruth Dillon is Minister at Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC, Hindhead, Wessex Synod

#### 1 Kings 2: 1 - 12

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.'

"Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me—what he did to the two commanders of Israel's armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood he stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.

"But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

"And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord: 'I will not put you to death by the sword.' But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood."

Then David rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. He had

reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

#### Reflection

David and Solomon were two of the most renowned kings in Israel's History. Yet in these verses in chapter two, we see a father and son having an intimate conversation on David's death bed. David the king who was faithful, yet also warlike, kind, obedient to God and served God's people speaks to his son Solomon. A father stressing the need to his son to make God the centre of his life, to act with wisdom and be loyal to God's people.

I wonder what Solomon was thinking as David drew his last breath?

We shall never know. I know my experience, however, when I sat with my mother as she was nearing the end of her life. Words that I had said in haste years earlier came back to rest in my mind, and tender words spoken in joy and love rested in my heart.

My mother, like David also wanted to share with me some final words of advice before she could speak no longer; words of encouragement, affirmation and love. Like Solomon, I felt this was a privilege, but some people do not have that opportunity to utter words to their loved ones in the final moments before death. Those who die in road traffic accidents, terrorist attacks, conflicts, knife crime, strokes, brain haemorrhage and sudden death to name a few.

David knew his son's faults yet focussed on his traits of wisdom and loyalty, and it wasn't till he lay dying that he realised he needed to encourage him in his role as King, Protector and Sage.

Let us not wait till we are progressing through the veil of earth to the realm of Heaven, but let us always find the opportunity to encourage and affirm those we love, for we never know when our own mortality ceases.

*Lord, may I daily utter words of encouragement  
may I daily affirm your people  
then when the time of final resting is near  
may I return to the source of Love Amen.*

ceremony was held to dedicate the building to the glory of God. I have never forgotten it. It was the first thanksgiving service in the URC that I had ever attended (my background being Anglican). There were so many people that it was packed to the rafters, and the music and singing was beautiful. It was the beginning of a new journey with God at the centre of the new congregation.

However, in the midst of the ceremony in the temple on Mount Zion, during the planned and executed ritual of dedication, something interrupts them! It stops the whole ceremony. A cloud filled the house of the Lord and the priests were unable to minister because of the thickness of the cloud. The Lord's glory fill the building and Solomon reminds the people that the Lord had said that he would dwell in thick darkness.

If we look back at our own lives, God is often to be found in the darkness, in the misery and the desolation. In the lonely places, and in the desert when we feel abandoned. God is not always in the beautiful buildings. He is not confined by bricks and mortar, however beautiful they may be. He is in our hearts and in our minds, waiting for us to call on Him.

#### Prayer

Father, so often, when we gather to worship you,  
we have set an agenda, an order of worship, prepared a meditation;  
we have come ready and we are following the plan.  
We feel your Spirit here in our buildings.  
We know you are with us.  
In your way, interrupt us.  
Return us to the simple truth of your Presence  
here in your call to us to follow you.  
Open us to you now, O God. Amen.

1 Kings 8: 1 - 13

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. So they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

Then Solomon said,

‘The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in for ever.’

Reflection

I was present at the first service in the new building of Whittlesford URC in the Eastern Synod. It was a wonderful occasion. Whilst no sacrifices were made, it was nevertheless a momentous occasion. The sacrifices had been made long before we had reached this point, and at the end of its construction, a

from 1 Kings 2: 13-46

Now Adonijah, the son of Haggith, went to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother. Bathsheba asked him, “Do you come peacefully?” He answered, “Yes, peacefully.” Then he added, “I have something to say to you.” “You may say it,” she replied. “As you know,” he said, “the kingdom was mine. All Israel looked to me as their king. But things changed, and the kingdom has gone to my brother; for it has come to him from the Lord. Now I have one request to make of you. Do not refuse me.” “You may make it,” she said. So he continued, “Please ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife.” “Very well,” Bathsheba replied, “I will speak to the king for you.” When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king’s mother, and she sat down at his right hand. “I have one small request to make of you,” she said. “Do not refuse me.” The king replied, “Make it, my mother; I will not refuse you.” So she said, “Let Abishag the Shunammite be given in marriage to your brother Adonijah.” King Solomon answered his mother, “Why do you request Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? You might as well request the kingdom for him—after all, he is my older brother—yes, for him and for Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah!” Then King Solomon swore by the Lord: “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if Adonijah does not pay with his life for this request! And now, as surely as the Lord lives—he who has established me securely on the throne of my father David and has founded a dynasty for me as he promised—Adonijah shall be put to death today!” So King Solomon gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he struck down Adonijah and he died.

To Abiathar the priest the king said, “Go back to your fields in Anathoth. You deserve to die, but I will not put you to death now, because you carried the ark of the Sovereign Lord before my father David and shared all my father’s hardships.” So Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the Lord, fulfilling the word the Lord had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli.

When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the

altar. King Solomon was told that Joab had fled to the tent of the Lord and was beside the altar. Then Solomon ordered Benaiah son of Jehoiada, "Go, strike him down!" So Benaiah entered the tent of the Lord and said to Joab, "The king says, 'Come out!'" But he answered, "No, I will die here."

Benaiah reported to the king, "This is how Joab answered me." Then the king commanded Benaiah, "Do as he says. Strike him down and bury him...So Benaiah son of Jehoiada went up and struck down Joab and killed him, and he was buried at his home out in the country. The king put Benaiah son of Jehoiada over the army in Joab's position and replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest.

Then the king sent for Shimei and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and live there, but do not go anywhere else. The day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley, you can be sure you will die; your blood will be on your own head."...But three years later, two of Shimei's slaves ran off to Achish son of Maakah, king of Gath, and Shimei was told, "Your slaves are in Gath." At this, he saddled his donkey and went to Achish at Gath in search of his slaves. So Shimei went away and brought the slaves back from Gath. When Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had returned, the king summoned Shimei and said to him, "Did I not make you swear by the Lord and warn you, 'On the day you leave to go anywhere else, you can be sure you will die'? At that time you said to me, 'What you say is good. I will obey.' Why then did you not keep your oath to the Lord and obey the command I gave you?"...Then the king gave the order to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he went out and struck Shimei down and he died.

The kingdom was now established in Solomon's hands.

### Reflection

Here we have a young King Solomon after having recently acceded to his father's throne. David had given him some wise advice, to be strong and observe what the Lord required. In this passage we certainly see Solomon doing just that. Asserting his authority, portraying himself as a king to be feared and respected. He's even had his own brother put to death. All of these things help him to consolidate his throne, remove those who may be a threat, or simply remove those who do not obey what the Lord and/or Solomon has commanded to them to do.

Even without going into the enormous issues of *historic* slavery that are being discussed in the denominations; as 21<sup>st</sup> Century disciples and churches we need to face what is going on here and now.

It's easy to pretend we're not involved, but as we prepare for Christmas and think about a baby born in exile and poverty, we should ask; "who made those Christmas jumpers and harvested the vegetables?" Ask about the people who clean our cars and do our nails for this '*season of goodwill*'.

Modern-day slavery is real. It's on our doorsteps in urban, suburban and rural areas; it's in our shops, it's happening to people we know; people who make our lives comfortable.

We cannot be disciples sharing God's love if we don't ask questions and act. It's terribly complicated... but if in doubt... perhaps don't buy!

Let's try to ensure that no slave-owners benefit from our happy Christmas.

### Prayer

Lord, we know it's not so simple  
as not buying goods  
or services,  
because slaves may suffer from our not buying,  
but it is one way we can protest.

We have a voice  
help us use it.  
Help us ensure that modern-day slaves  
are rescued  
and perpetrators brought to justice.

Help us to ask ourselves:  
do we condone those perpetrators  
by not acting?

Lord, as we pray for the slaves  
forgive us. Amen

on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.” Therefore command that cedars from the Lebanon be cut for me. My servants will join your servants, and I will give you whatever wages you set for your servants; for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians.’

...King Solomon conscripted forced labour out of all Israel; the levy numbered thirty thousand men. He sent them to the Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts; they would be a month in the Lebanon and two months at home; Adoniram was in charge of the forced labour. Solomon also had seventy thousand labourers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, besides Solomon’s three thousand three hundred supervisors who were over the work, having charge of the people who did the work. At the king’s command, they quarried out great, costly stones in order to lay the foundation of the house with dressed stones. So Solomon’s builders and Hiram’s builders and the Gebalites did the stonecutting and prepared the timber and the stone to build the house.

#### Reflection

At long-last there was peace and Solomon set about building the temple that his father, David had been unable to think about because of the wars. Hiram, who had been a close friend of David, provided Cedar and Cypress wood. Solomon was most complimentary about the wood-cutting skills of Hiram’s people, and paid handsomely for the work.

I love the historic minutiae: another passage explains how thousands of trees were transported in a sophisticated operation involving log-rafts floating 100 miles by sea, then carried overland a further 50 miles to Jerusalem – a massive undertaking before the building work could begin. A phenomenal number of people were involved; here’s where I start to struggle with the story.

Did you notice the phrase ‘conscripted forced labour’?

My Study-Bible tells me that the conscripted force would have been mainly ‘aliens with permanent residency in Israel’.

It looks to me, like modern-day slavery.

However, despite all this, he still has time to listen to his mother! Not only this, he treats her with the utmost respect. He seats her at his right hand. He listens and takes heed of her advice. Now, I’m not quite comparing myself to one of the most renowned and rich kings in history - but I’d like to think that, most of the time, I too treat my mother with the respect she deserves.

However, it can be all too easy when we move onto pastures new, take on new roles, new responsibilities and new personality traits, for us to forget not only our mothers, but our family and friends whom we have left behind both physically and, potentially, emotionally. There’s no replacement for parental advice, as we heard in yesterday’s passage, too.

Now Solomon has the full set, the advice from his dying father, and advice from the Queen Mother. He’s consolidated his ‘court’, he can now go off and rule Israel!

But he, like us, should not forget the wisdom of those who have been before, those who love us and those who care about us, including Jesus Christ.

#### Prayer

God of wisdom and truth,  
help us to remember where we came from;  
as a new year dawns,  
don’t let us forget who we have met,  
those who we love and respect.

Let us take from them all we can in advice, love, and wisdom,  
so that we can move forward with integrity,  
filled by your love.

Amen

[Friday 7th December Solomon asks for wisdom](#)

Ann Barton, Member of Whittlesford URC and retired Church House staff member

1 Kings 3: 1 - 15

Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh’s daughter and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished



building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem. The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord.

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great 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. God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.'

Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem, where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He offered up burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.

#### Reflection

What would you ask God for if you were lucky enough to be given the chance? I spent a little time thinking about this and it is not easy as it sounds. There may be many things we need, and it will take us some time to prioritise the list. It

warmongers and power brokers, breaking their stranglehold, in order that God may decide FOR the oppressed?

What might we learn from such theology? It seems to me this text is one of those timely reminders that we can all too easily divide people into believers/non-believers, Christians/those of other faiths when perhaps we are being challenged to see that God does not use those categories. God might not always decide for the believer, or the church-goer but can, and does, judge for the oppressed – who might be of another faith, or no faith at all.

This takes us into the realms of a preferential option for the poor, which is also seen through the Gospels as Jesus ministers to the most marginalised, actually defines his ministry in precisely those terms (Luke 4), and who tells us sheep and goats will be separated not on the basis of what they believe but on the basis of how they respond to those in deepest need.

#### Prayer

When the texts are tough, O God, help us to hear you speaking.

When the message is uncomfortable, O Lord, challenge us not to seek quick palliative treatments to make our reading easier.

When our lives need to come under your spotlight, O God, we trust in your guiding and your everlasting mercy. Amen

[Monday 10th December A Temple built from forced labour](#)

Linda Rayner Elder at Bramhall URC and part-time URC Coordinator for Fresh Expressions

from 1 Kings 5: 1 - 18

Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend to David. Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, 'You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. So I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to my father David, "Your son, whom I will set



Sunday 9th December PSALM 76

The Rev'd Dr Rosalind Selby is Principal of Northern College and a member of Didsbury URC.

In Judah's land God's name is known;  
in Isr'el he is great.

In Salem he has pitched his tent,  
his home in Zion set.

He broke the fiery arrows there,  
the military might  
Of those who  
with their swords and shields  
against us came to fight.

Your splendour is more glorious  
than hillsides rich with prey.  
Brave men were stripped  
of all their spoil;  
asleep in death they lay.

Not one of those great warriors  
could lift his hands to kill.  
At your rebuke, O Jacob's God,  
rider and horse lay still.

For you alone are to be feared—  
before you, who can stand?  
Who can endure your anger, LORD,  
the judgments you command?

Reflection

The commonest reading of this Psalm suggests the God of Israel will, from Jerusalem, judge the nations (ie not Israel, the others) and destroy all who threaten God's people (ie Israel). There are, indeed, other texts in the Hebrew bible with this message which helps us to slide into such a reading. ... I'm not convinced (and not every commentary is convinced either) that this is the distinction being made. Is not the Psalmist saying God will judge the

From heav'n  
your verdict was pronounced;  
the land was hushed in awe,  
When you arose to save the poor  
and vindicate your law.

Your wrath against the human race  
will surely bring you praise;  
Those who survive your wrath  
will learn  
restraint in all their ways.

Make vows before the LORD  
your God;  
be sure to keep your word.  
Let people from surrounding lands  
bring tribute to the LORD.

The LORD alone is great, and he  
must surely be revered.  
The will of rulers he subdues;  
by earth's kings he is feared.

didn't take Solomon long. He asked for an understanding mind - the ability to understand what is good, right and just. Solomon asked for wisdom - to govern the people and to distinguish between right and wrong. It is a selfless prayer, not something for himself but for the task at hand – the need he saw in governing the Kingdom well. Notice what God said to him – “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” God did not promise him anything. He did not say He would give Solomon what he asked for. It was an ask without the “and I will give it to you.” Strictly speaking, it is not a “blank cheque”. Look at God's response to Solomon. The “offer” God posed is more like a test: “Tell me what you want from me.” Solomon's request reveals his true heart. It reveals what matters to him.

Our asking today reveals our heart. It shows where our concerns are and where our priorities lie. Our prayers are indicators of the matters of our heart. What are you praying for today? What are you asking God for?

God was pleased. He saw that Solomon's heart yearned for the Kingdom and for righteousness, so God adds on to what Solomon asked. 'I will give you what you have not asked for - both riches and honour - so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.

The message here is 'seek first God's concerns and He will take care of our concerns'. We pray that we will always walk in the wisdom of God, listen to and obey God's Word.

Prayer

Living and loving Father,  
Speak and help us to listen  
Listen and help us to speak  
Than in praise, prayer and teaching  
You may touch our lives and make us whole again. (John Slow)

2 Kings 3: 16 - 28

Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One woman said, 'Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. Then this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne.' But the other woman said, 'No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours.' The first said, 'No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine.' So they argued before the king.

Then the king said, 'One says, "This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead"; while the other says, "Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one."' So the king said, 'Bring me a sword', and they brought a sword before the king. The king said, 'Divide the living boy in two; then give half to one, and half to the other.' But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—'Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!' The other said, 'It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.' Then the king responded: 'Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.' All Israel heard of the judgement that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.

### Reflection

This story is generally used to help prove that Solomon was a wise king. So what is wisdom? Is wisdom always being right? Is wisdom having the correct words? Is wisdom challenging these two women to sacrifice a child? Is wisdom a willingness to hear the stories of some unimportant women of questionable reputation? Is wisdom listening and observing in such a way that Solomon knew the correct question to ask in order to save the life of the child and respect the life of the mother?

Today we are often challenged to know what we think and what we want immediately. We are confronted by people who make decisions based on limited information. Social media gives us information before we even know we need to make a decision. Fake news slips into our newsfeed catching us unaware. And we jump to conclusions. Perhaps wisdom is the skill to not jump to conclusions too quickly or make snap judgements.

Solomon listened to the mothers. Perhaps, as he listened, he took in the tone, noted the dress, looked into each women's eyes. Perhaps his wisdom comes as much from listening as from gathering the "information" presented by each woman by her "presence." Based on all the information gathered, he formulated his question. A life was saved, and a mother reunited with her child.

Can we pause long enough to gather information; to listen and observe those without power in order to ask the right questions, to make the right decisions as followers of Jesus? Can we allow God to speak in the pauses and through the marginalised so that the information we gather can restore life—our lives and the life of those around us? Can we allow the wisdom of God to work through us to bring love and hope to the broken?

Living God,

Give us courage to stop, look, and listen.

May we stop in our busy, demanding lives;

As we stop, help us look around and see you—

in those who are content and those who are troubled, in those who are powerful and those without a voice.

Help us listen and hear you guide us.

Give us courage to pause, to listen and to act with wisdom.

Amen