

A God-Listening Heart

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1 Kings 2:1-3, 3:3-15a

It could be that it is all delusional. That we think we can know God's will (or even that there is God). How do we know it's God and not our own ego? And we hear warnings in scripture of false prophets... they have riz, they are smart, they can read the spirit of the times like no one else... But really, how do we know what's false and what's true? What is truth anyway?

Maybe it *is* all delusional. But maybe it isn't...

Maybe it's the really real... We can never know with certainty what is God's will. Maybe it's the language that gets in your way or conversely the language that could lead you in. It's all poetry for that which is ultimately beyond words. Whatever language we use...

What is God's will?

What is God's yearning?

Where is the movement of the holy spirit?

How is God luring us towards greater goodness?

How is God still speaking?

What is the best way to love in this situation?

Whatever the language for spiritual discernment, for seeking God's guidance, it is **a heart belief**. You feel it more in your heart than in your mind. A God-listening heart knows that love is the greatest power—trusts that, is loyal to that. Hatred, greed, ignorance, fear, all of these are very, very powerful, but love is the greatest power. Not just love of self, and of family and of tribe and of nation but love of all ... especially this! **love of all!**... God is love.

How does this come about? This heart's rightness with God? How do you get a God-listening heart? If we are born with this, call it original blessing, how do we keep it through this hard life? A God-listening heart....

Being raised in a religious home, reinforced by a religious community like church, synagogue, mosque, temple sure helps! Peter Marty writes beautifully in the Christian century about what he calls accumulated faith. "Faith is a deeply ingrained condition formed through steady habits, disciplined practices, and reliable instincts that take shape over long stretches of time. It's a way of life that acquires its layers and contours incrementally, developing ever so gradually and often imperceptibly." At Mayflower, we call this Faith Formation, and we are wholeheartedly and inter generationally dedicated to it.

This! (pointing to the Bible). We need to take great care in our we interpret this, our holy book. Not all of it is life giving. But this text, the essence of it, and the rituals, and the songs, and the practices, and the beliefs, that grow out of it...yes, this sacred library is so generative... And it all comes from one seed, I think, I wonder, one precious seed at the heart of this holy book... the belief in the oneness of God... this radical monotheism... there is an ultimate referent that puts all things in perspective, ever reminding... you are not the center of the world, God is... a God, that is loyal to all of creation, to all the diversity of creation, animals, plants, ecosystems, humans, all peoples, no one tribe privileged, all are chosen people, every child a beloved child of God. And so must we be, loyal to creation, to the all, and act accordingly. And so must we love all creation and act accordingly, always wondering how God is at work healing this broken world, Tikkun Olam, and always asking what is the best way to love now in this time and place.

How do you know it's God's will?

Two answers. Both true?

You never really do.

And you know it when you feel it in your heart. Remember that song that will never be forgotten?... "Oh deep in my heart, I do believe...."

Our Bible story today is about a leader, a public figure, a person in the headlines every day. Solomon was thrust into kingship at a young age, David's son, and he's not asking for riches or power or fame. He's asking God for one thing and one thing only, "Give me a discerning heart" He values God's will above all other values that motivate humans...yes...He's a person of his times, like all persons, with all the ingrained prejudices of his time and place, like toxic masculinity and caste system thinking, but he wants to be more. He's a fallible, wounded person, like all persons, with distractions, addictions, and neurosis, but he wants to be more. He will have to make impossible choices, sometimes between two very high values. He *will* make mistakes and there *will* be unintended consequences even from the most brilliant, compassionate solutions. We hope that his family and friends tend to his heart, Solomon the

person and not the king. And we hope he gets his news from reliable sources. And we hope that he surrounds himself with great advisors who also seek the common good. And we know that through it all, the busy days and sleepless nights, he will stay grounded in prayer... "Give me a discerning heart Oh God that I may know what to do." "He has found the center for his life that gives a creative distance from it all so that everything he sees, hears, and feels can be tested against this source", this center, God. (Henri Nouwen)

Oh can't you see and hear an opera about Solomon in your mind's eye and ear? About this leader with hard decisions to make, not enough time, advisor's giving him advice... singing to him with passion about what's at stake... and he listens intently to everyone... but then he turns to God, the refrain throughout the opera, and pleads with his beautiful counter tenor voice... "Give your servant a discerning mind, to govern your people... not my will oh God, but your will be done"

So you're in the audience, experiencing this opera about King Solomon, thinking about how much it reminds you of today's headlines, about kings and wannabee kings. When all of a sudden the spotlight shines on you and the singers on the stage stop singing and look at you, so does the orchestra in the pit, all eyes are on you... not judging eyes but curious eyes...

Do you have a God-listening heart like Solomon?

What do you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

What goodness is God luring you towards?

Do you listen carefully to others, especially to the poor and marginalized? Do you listen to the earth and its creatures? Do you listen to God? Are you mindful of your ego needs and your addictions and neurosis? Are you always wrestling with all that normalized dominance stuff you were unintentionally raised in? Are you curious, courageous, willing even to let some things die in you in order to give God room to start something new? Are you committed to listen to the still speaking God until your last breath?

What is your song?.. in this great opera of life? Is it a love song in harmony with the love song of the creator?

I am not saying anything original this morning. Nothing flashy and new. Not at all. Thank God. Just reminding you and me of our ancient wisdom. Stuff is coming at us so fast and furiously all the time now, trying to lure us into other ways of being and thinking... And so often we are

caught up in the pressures of life, the dramas of work, and the suffering from this mortal coil flesh. But we gotta stick to the plan bequeathed onto us by our parents and church on our baptism day. Simply that. But that. Always *seeking* a God-listening heart.

In conclusion, I want to end with some more from the Solomon story..., just because.... There's something delightful about it, kind of quirky, but it's there for good reason, I think.

He's older now. Been at it for awhile. It's not a summation of his power and wealth and success as a king...the magnificence of his rule... though it does say that under his kingship "the people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea and they ate and drank and were happy." They were secure. No, this passage has to do with his songwriting! Hear this and listen, in particular, to what he wrote about.... I'll end with this...

God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, **30** so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. **31** He was wiser than anyone else, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, children of Mahol; (it does get a little competitive here) his fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. **32** He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. **33** He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. **34** People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon. 12

Sources

Marty, Peter, "Accumulated faith", The Christian Century, February 2024.

Morrison, Danny, and Charles Olson, Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church, Albaan Institute, 1997.

Nouwen, Henri, With Open Hands.

