

Start as you mean to go on – 1 Kings 2: 10-12; 3: 3-14

Did you hear the news last week about the auction of recently issued Charles III bank notes as charity fundraiser? One single £10 note sold for £17,000 during bidding. It made me think again about the long process of succession ... from the stark initial announcement the queen is dead, long live the king... to... much later... new stamps and new money...

We expect succession: the crown is handed on to the next in line in the royal family... but it wasn't quite like that long ago ... so in the history of God's people, after Saul messes up, David (not a relative) is given the throne. But he– though pretty rubbish at times- still passes the rule onto his son, Solomon, as we saw in the reading Angela shared with us. After his father, David, dies, Solomon starts as he means to go on ... *Solomon loved the Lord*, the narrator tells us, *walking in the statutes of his father David* ...so far so good... of course, you know what comes next....

only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.... only ... makes it sound like that's bad thing... so what's that about?

High places: often in the Bible this is code for traditional places of worship ... Some high places -like the altar Jacob built at Bethel, the place where he wrestled with an angel/God... are perfectly legit... but some traditional places of worship for other religions... and thus other gods... ...well they're far less OK... even if people just added a shrine for the God of Israel into the mix, which they did sometimes...

Of course, Israel was not unique in reusing places of spiritual significance to other faiths – Christians have form on this, too... and maybe it's not all bad...we could think about it as a way of recognising others' reaching out to God...

But the throwaway line is there to make us pause and think... about Solomon ... how does he understand God? How is he a good leader of God's people? And about ourselves... we can't separate ourselves from the reality of living in 21st century Britain... but we can think about what we embrace unquestioningly from culture around us... and how we attend to God's call on our lives and hearts and minds... and allow ourselves to be reshaped to be more like Jesus.

The high place Solomon has chosen in this particular story... Gibeon... is the place where God has in the past given God's people a great victory... is the place where in David's time the tabernacle was sited... the symbolic tent where God met with God's people... So, a place of deep religious and historical significance... but also a place where the Solomon turns to face the future...as God appears to him in a dream and asks him the \$10 000 question...

Ask what I should give you... such an interesting offer ... makes me think about 1001 Nights... the genie and the lamp and all that... you have 3 wishes... where your choice of wishes are an indicator of your wisdom and/or cunning...blow them all on a great new wardrobe and a fancy dinner... or... wish for something better/longer lasting/of greater moral value...

I guess God's question could mean simply *ask whatever you like and I will give it to you...* it could be a Supermarket Sweep kind of offer... grab what you can... there are no provisos... no limits... no small print...

But perhaps there's a hint of... *what do you think I should give you...* bearing in mind that I am God...and you are human... bearing in mind that I your God have great plans for you and this people...

So maybe this is God musing in Solomon's presence... Wondering aloud about what would be appropriate... perhaps even inviting Solomon to cooperate with God... what do you think you need so we can work together, you as king, me as God?

Because this God is not simply the deity you pray to so that the rain comes at the right time and there's a good harvest... this God is not magical, but relational... longing to connect with people, work with people...

The question may be brief and pithy... the answer is nothing like... Solomon takes 4 of our modern verses, most of which are not his actual answer, but a preamble, a kind of rationale for his eventual response...

Solomon reminds God (like God's forgotten!) about God's faithfulness to his father, David...and of David's faithfulness to God ... of a mutual steadfast love between human and deity... reminds God of the gift of a son – Solomon – to continue the dynasty... and then the most amazing line...

An acknowledgement of who he – Solomon – actually is: *although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.*

King he may be, but he admits he's not all that... and in terms of who he is king of, importantly it's not *over* so much as *in the midst of the people whom you have chosen*... Solomon knows who he is... in relation to the people... in relation to God...

So, he asks for an understanding mind and discernment... or... more traditionally/proverbially, wisdom...

As in so many good stories... this is the correct answer... You have hit the jackpot... ... your modesty and wisdom mean you will get the lot! What you asked for... *a wise and discerning mind* And also what you did not... *riches and honour all your life*

Also, as in so many good stories... at the end Solomon wakes up and discovers it was all a dream...

Now, does this exchange show that Solomon *is* wise? Or *becomes* wise? And what does God actually give him in the end– discernment, understanding *and* riches beyond his imagination? You'll have to come to Duxford next week to find out as Derek helps us to think about how the story continues...

Meanwhile... let's take a moment to reflect on our hearts' desire... what, if God asked us that same question, how would we reply...

There's an ancient prayer of the Church, and included by Thomas Cranmer in the Church of England's prayer book ... now often now part of traditional evening prayer... about prayerful asking... for what's good for us... prayerfully asking for our desires to be reshaped in God's ways... I'm going to pray it for us...

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. **Amen.**