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1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14; Matthew 6:24-33  
“Nailing It with God”

I cannot pass up a story like that in the Hebrew Bible today without commenting on the value of dreams for hearing God's word to us.

Former Notre Dame University religions professor, Morton Kelsey, studied dreams from a Jungian perspective and wrote large and small books on dreams. The small work is called, *Dreams: A Way of Listening to God*.

John. A. Sanford, a Jungian analyst and Episcopal priest, writes in *Dreams, God's Forgotten Language* that dreams were regarded in both the Old and New Testaments as revelations from God...the entire Bible is the story of God's breakthrough into the human conscious mind via the unconscious...and the early church regarded dreams the same way as the Bible: as revelations from God.

For moderns he writes: “Our dreams are the voice of the psychic center within us that enables us to strive for wholeness. This psychic center can be characterized as reconciling and Christlike. Experiences with this center belong among the highest ones in human life; people have always called them experiences with God.”

This affirmation of dreams as a way of listening to God is a bonus part of this sermon. We all dream. Some remember dreams better than others but we can work on recalling them. And because we all dream they can help us become fully whole.

The biblical text makes clear that God appears to Solomon in a dream by night. Solomon's father, the great King David has died and Solomon succeeds the throne and before he assumes his reign and leadership God offers him in a dream whatever he wants. Like a genie from a bottle, or like a fairy tale, God says to Solomon: “Ask what I should give you.”

Of all the things Solomon could say, he asks for an understanding mind to govern God's people and the ability to discern between good and evil.

God is happy and generously responds: “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...I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor 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.”

Solomon nails it with God. This sounds like the so-called “prosperity gospel” and could mistakenly be interpreted as such: The view that if one is faithful, one will get rich. It doesn’t happen that way and never will; especially when we see the faithful poor in developing countries and in parts of this country.

Solomon is genuine and sincere. He truly wants to be God’s person in the world: the best king and leader. It’s a great model for all leaders. And Solomon dreams the dream for us.

God is still asking and is asking us daily: “Ask what I should give you.” The way we nail it for God is to do what Solomon did, ask for understanding and discernment of what is right and wrong and God will give it to us and more without defining what the more is. It might be riches and long life. Whatever it is, it will be wonderful.

Two religious giants picked up on this approach to the Christian life with prayers that have become legendary.

First, Francis of Assisi who prayed: “O Divine One, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand...”

Second, Reinhold Niebuhr who wrote in a sermon in the early nineteen forties “The Serenity Prayer” adopted the world over by twelve step programs: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference.”

The original prayer by Niebuhr goes more to the heart of how we live our lives according to Solomon. The prayer, which is longer than what we are used to, goes as follows:

God, give us grace to accept with serenity  
 the things that cannot be changed,  
 Courage to change the things  
 which should be changed,  
 and the Wisdom to distinguish  
 the one from the other.

Living one day at a time,  
 Enjoying one moment at a time,  
 Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
 Taking, as Jesus did,  
 This sinful world as it is,  
 Not as I would have it,  
 Trusting that You will make all things right,  
 If I surrender to Your will,  
 So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
 And supremely happy with You forever in the next.

Amen.

Niebuhr goes a step further than Solomon. He trusts that God will make all things right. Solomon merely asks for understanding and discernment of good and evil. Trust is implicit. Solomon trusts that if he asks for the right things God *will* make all things right. We, not Solomon, don't know how but if we wait long enough it comes right.

The gospel text picks up on this theme. The final verse states: "... strive first for the dominion of God and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The hymn following this sermon is based on this text.

This sounds like a pipe dream. We don't know what we will get but we will get measurably more than if we did not seek to live in God's way. We can ask for riches if we want but judging from the texts today God prefers that we ask for things like:

*Understanding* to govern if we are political leaders, understanding in leadership if we run our own business or teach, understanding in parenting *throughout* our lives, etc.

*Discernment* in knowing what is right and wrong, which reminds me of the cover quote that “no-one was ever wise by chance.” We might need to read an excellent book on ethics.

*Wisdom*. This was ably covered by Reinhold Niebuhr and we add “compassion and courage” as Confucius does on our cover.

Finally, to seek first *the dominion of God* is to put peace first, justice first, love first, and compassion first. We can add other Godly qualities but we’ll leave it there. And when we advocate for peace, justice and compassion they can spread to the four corners of the world so all can benefit.

I remember recalling these kinds of things with our family in Belgium. We were discussing politics and pharmaceuticals. After waxing eloquently our cousin said I was too idealistic. A teen would say: “Dream on.” I like the dream, in fact, it’s the way God speaks to me. I’m totally convinced that God speaks to us in our dreams. Amen.