

A Little Humility Goes A Long Way

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Sunday, August 16, 2009

It sounds so *simple* in the story today! King Solomon asks God for “an understanding mind.” He admits that in the big picture he, Solomon, does not know even how to “go out and come in.” Humble!

So God gives Solomon a “wise and discerning mind” – and so much more besides! Honor, riches, length of life!

Hmmm. Would that it were so easy for the rest of us! Wouldn't humility be worth the price? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be appropriately humble about your gifts and at the same time ask for and receive everything you ever secretly dreamed of?

Humility for most of us doesn't come easy. Real humility comes from lessons learned the hard way. It comes from a conviction about what makes for love, strength or progress – and what does not. Real humility knows what it means to screw up and still to believe that you can do better. Real humility does not pretend or posture. Real humility knows when enough is enough.

Not all that claims to be humble, of course, is. The other day I got a phone call from a Christian organization wanting to get me involved in men's ministry. They wanted me to host barbecues for men in my backyard and tell men about the man's Jesus, the Jesus who honors his father and keeps his women and children in their biblical place. All this for the amazingly low price of \$299. A humble proposition, he said, to invite men to retake their rightful place in the family and society. When I told him a little about our church, he got a little less humble. Maybe it was when I told him about the Open and Affirming thing. Or maybe it was the part about valuing the gifts of women and children. Maybe it was the part where I asked him where in the bible he remembers Jesus and pigging out on baby back ribs. Anyway, he hung up on me

I know. Sometimes I'm not so humble myself.

A little real humility goes a long way. It's about taking responsibility for your own soul, valuing the small gifts that you came into the world with and then asking to be shown where you fit into the big picture. And sometimes you get it wrong.

There's a wonderful children's story about a small knight and a young dragon. They both thought they knew that they were supposed to do battle – but they had no idea how. So they ordered books to teach the knight how to be a knight and the dragon how to breathe fire. Once read up, they began to practice. A bit awkward at first. The little knight with his sword and spears and armor keeps getting turned around and running into things. The dragon starts fires around himself and gets burned.

The big day of battle arrives. They charge, whack and singe away, do everything they think they are supposed to until finally they slump in exhaustion and wonder what that was all about – the beginning of humility. Enough already. So they decide to put their knightly and dragonly gifts to different uses. These supposed implacable enemies decide to start a restaurant called the K & D Barbecue. The knight skewers the meat with his swords and spears. The dragon supplies the fire. Miraculously, nobody loses and everybody wins. Imagine that!

You see, humility isn't about self-abasement and believing you are worthless. Humility is knowing you can't always see how you fit into the larger picture, but trusting that you do fit in and asking to be shown how.

Sometimes I am touched by what I don't know. The other day my partner Susan and I dropped by to see Evelyn King over at Wingate Rehab in East Longmeadow. We chatted a bit, and we heard something of what it's like for Evelyn to learn how to cope after surgery removed most of her right leg. What she wanted to talk about was getting to church. Evelyn's sense of humor is still there. She said she'd like to get to church but Larry her husband hasn't got a car anymore and she hasn't got a leg anymore and it's awkward getting to church that way.

There's courage for the asking! Am I right? I am sure we will find a way to get her to church, but look at what she brings with her!

I had a touching encounter a couple of weeks ago in the supermarket. A member of South Church and I were chatting about this and that, when he asked me about my divorce. I replied warily. It's not something I talk about easily. He also asked about my relationship with Susan, whom he sees in church. I was wondering where this was all going. But then he made an interesting comment. He said, "So, you haven't really been alone for along time." I saw that he wasn't being critical. He cares and he simply has some wisdom I don't have. Being alone may not be my lesson at this time – my lessons now seem to be about doing relationships in new ways. But I realized that I was being shown that there are other gifts out there I don't have – but if I ever need them, they are there for the asking.

Here's the thing. Real humility is one part knowing that you don't know and one part knowing you can ask. I believe in a God who hears my asking and will show me what I need to know. I believe that God provides – not answers, but ways: courage, humor, kindness, wisdom when to say no, when to say yes, when to laugh it off, when to get angry. I ask because I believe there is more out there than I know. I ask because I am not done. I ask because I am not alone.

A little humility goes a long way. There are so many life lessons that could be salted and sorted out with a dose of humility. But you have to ask. And the asking begins with words like that prayer of King Solomon: *Lord, I don't even know how to go out and come in. Give me a wise and discerning heart so that I might prosper in your kingdom.*

It *is* possible, you see – more than possible – you can ask for what you need! It is possible to stand even in the messiness of change or loss and be shown "an embarrassment of riches" – and not just embarrassment!