

Preached by Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA 22310
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1 Kings 2:10 –12, 3:3–14

POWERFUL MUSCLES BUT NO PERSONALITY

Einstein said we should take care not to make intellect our God. I didn't know Einstein was also Presbyterian. He says this because intellect has powerful muscles, but no personality. Our discoveries, our intellectual accomplishments only have value when they help us act in a truly loving, compassionate way toward others.

What good is it for us to have knowledge without the joy of positive connections—people that we encounter every day, the people all around us. How powerful can we be, ultimately, when we are isolated from the world around us? David spent his career uniting Israel. His lifetime was spent in building up what Solomon called a people too great to number. He gives this kingdom over to his son Solomon. And what does Solomon seek? Does he go to school to learn how to be the general that his father was? Does he work his way through all the political establishments of that day learning from each what needs to happen in order to be an effective leader, one who can govern? What is it that Solomon is seeking? Well, to paraphrase Einstein, Solomon wanted more than power. He wanted even more than security. He wanted to be able to understand the needs or those around him.

Understanding heart ... it involves both the intellect and our hearts, doesn't it? I think if we are honest, deep within us, we know intellectually that concern for the welfare of others is in fact our greatest survival instinct. Contemplate that. When we are concerned truly for one another, we are recipients of that concern in return. It says that David ruled for forty years. But what is Solomon famous for in his time? Is it longevity of rule? He's not the warrior king. He's not the schooled military whiz. That's what Solomon means when he says, "I'm like a child. I wouldn't know how to begin to go out and lead an army or to come back from leading an army. That's what he's saying when he says, "I don't know how to come out or go in."

Solomon knows that he's going to be very different, and different is always a little frightening. He's going to be very different than his father. He's going to be a different kind of leadership role. I'm so glad that Solomon did not seek to maintain what his father had established. Instead, he sought to make it better. Solomon's rule is renowned for his willingness to walk in all the ways that were upright with God, as David had done, but then what Solomon seeks allows him to be so much more.

If we seek understanding for one another, all our other issues fall into place. If we understand that by putting a personality on that relationship that we love with Jesus Christ, and then living it out in our persona guided by the Holy Spirit, all our other issues—honesty, integrity, faithfulness, love trust, envy, greed, slander, gossip—are overcome.

All those powerful muscles that we develop for self defense—for a false sense of security—all those personality traits that we discern in one another and in ourselves, they all are overruled when the Holy Spirit comes and teaches us the difference between true goodness and that which is evil, and not in an analytical or abstract sense, but in the way that we connect with one another.

What's wisdom for us at church? What do you think it is? What does it mean for a church to actually seek the kind of understanding that Solomon asked God to give him? We need to be willing to claim our heritage, where the first thing we are supposed to receive from our connection—our community—is a shared sense of inner peace because of God's forgiveness. And then, that inner peace is supposed to move us beyond all those struggles we have inside—all that pain that we pretend isn't there, those hurts, those unexpected hostilities.

We move beyond all of that to a place that we've come to call now by many different names here at Bush Hill—to a place of hospitality—more than friendliness, more than smiling at one another, although those are still very essential. We move beyond our instincts to be safe to a place where we really and truly are to be an aid to one another.

I had one of those weekends. The group of men I associate with up in the mountains have a cabin, and every year we clean it, whether it needs it or not. And every year we try to do repairs. But, there were three or four doctors in the group, a couple of attorneys and a lot of retired folks, and then this Presbyterian minister. Way up at the top of the gable in the house the woodpeckers had taken over, and there were huge gaping holes—30 feet up in the air! So when we got there the first night we talked about how we would fix that. And the next day, we talked about it some more. And finally, someone who wasn't even in the group— a guest—showed up and he looked at the problem, then he looked at me and said, "Help me with the ladder." Within 20 minutes all the woodpecker holes were fixed. Within another 20 minutes, they were all painted. An hour later, the ladder was back where it was supposed to be. And I thought, if this guy hadn't come, we'd still be talking about fixing those holes!

I wonder if that's what happens in the church. We talk about our inner hostilities. We talk about the pain that we experience, but then we never move to "fix those holes." That night at supper, one of the younger members of our place in the mountains said, "You know, if we hadn't fixed those holes, we'd have had bats in the attic all winter." And I thought, yeah, that's kind of what happens to Christians sometimes, too. We neglect our spirituality sometimes to the point where there are bats in the belfry sometimes, I'm afraid.

Inner peace has to lead us to do the repair work on our connections with one another. The hardest thing I've had to deal with is getting Christians to forgive each other. When we get hurt in the church, it's like we never let it go. We remember it forever. And if we could just get folks to look at one another and say, "Yes, that cut me to the quick. But I'm beyond that. God has healed that hurt. God's taken me to a new, more powerful, secure spot of forgiveness." You see because—and we've got good scripture for this—

until we do that, not only is there a barrier between us and the other person, there's a barrier between us and God, one that we've erected.

This coming Wednesday I will have been an ordained minister 25 years. Next Sunday, we are going to have as many people participate in worship as possible as a way to celebrate that. And come to find out, even my brother is coming up from Florida, so you have to come back. It looks really bad when my brother comes to town, and you all don't come to church. And bring somebody with you, okay?

Let's celebrate today what it would mean to ask God to give us the wisdom that God gave to Solomon, to discern that which is hurtful from that which is helpful. And then God will draw us even closer to God's heart, and we will know that as we become more spiritual, we also become more connected to one another.

May God accomplish in our midst all of this and more for the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.