

That November I was 8-months pregnant and substitute teaching in a high school home economics class. I'd subbed in many different classrooms at Delano High School over the past couple years and quite often students passing by the room I was in would pop in to say hi. They knew me by then and I knew they liked me. Not because I was a pushover, but because they knew I treated them fairly and respected their efforts to achieve. Even the students who were just waiting for the day they could legally stop coming to classes didn't give me any trouble, unlike they did to some of the other subs.

On that cool afternoon, just after lunch break, I was at the teacher's desk. The classroom was large, providing for six kitchens spread over the space. The kids started to come into the room and everything seemed just fine. I didn't really realize that some of the kids encircled the desk so that I couldn't see into the farthest kitchenette. But soon it became apparent that something was going on over there that was going to need my attention. Two girls, about 15-years old were in that farthest kitchen space and they were snarling and snapping at each other. Their language was getting worse and worse, shifting from English to Spanish as their taunts and challenges became more graphic. Before I could make it across the room, they were punching, clawing and pulling out handfuls of each other's hair.

With my unborn baby leading the way, I quietly walked in between them and spoke softly and calmly. They backed off each other and I held my position. I continued to stay cool and reminded them they really didn't want to be fighting in school, that they knew they were in trouble and not to make it worse. I sent one of the boys to get the Vice Principal, who came immediately to the classroom with another administrator and escorted the girls to the office. The rest of the kids took their places around the kitchen tables and we proceeded with the lesson for that day.

Times have changed in the 44 years since then, and I don't think I would risk the same action today. But back then I knew I would be safe coming between these two Mexican girls, even though they were furious with each other. Weapons weren't common on campus back then. And I knew the culture in which these girls were raised provided an attitude of reverence and respect for life, especially unborn life. So, with the safety that understanding granted, my wisdom was well placed.

Our reading from the Hebrew scriptures today relates to us an account of the wisdom of Solomon. The story is widely known through all three of the Abrahamic traditions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. At this point in our common faith ancestry, the people of God are in a precarious position. They have become complacent in their faith lives. They don't feel the need to respect the Sovereign God who has always provided for their welfare. They have come to believe they've gotten to where they are today by their own efforts, and they've become lax in their customs and faith practices.

In fact, the very ruler whose prayer for wisdom is granted is among the worst offenders when it comes to honoring his champion. I'll bet you could ask just about anyone inside or outside of a church setting what they might know about King Solomon in the Bible and they would probably tell you he was a very wise king. That's the reputation he has held for millennia. They won't be likely to tell you that Solomon was a very flawed individual who ruled wisely only by the grace of God.

You see, Solomon, the son of King David and Bathsheba, had learned a lot at his father's knee. Remember, David lusted after the wife of Uriah the Hittite when he saw her bathing on her rooftop – as was a typical custom in those days. David arranged to have Uriah sent to the front lines of battle to be killed just so David could take Bathsheba as his wife. David and Bathsheba paid for their sins when their first-born son, Absalom, was killed unexpectedly in his youth, and they mourned excessively for their loss.

Solomon observed all this and – it seems – wanted to make sure HE wouldn't make the same mistakes his father had made. But actually, the apple didn't fall far from the tree. Even though Solomon was granted wisdom, he didn't use his gift as well as he might. Solomon loved to live the good life. He spent the exorbitant taxes he demanded on lush living and providing for over 500 wives and concubines. Still, he was a popular king, allowing all sorts of religions to flourish in his kingdom, including ones that required prostitution and even the sacrificing of infants. Solomon was a deeply flawed human being.

Yet, God used Solomon with all his flaws to maintain the presence of the Hebrew people in the land. Unfortunately, as Solomon's wealth became known throughout the region, it became a target the surrounding rulers were eager to acquire. And as soon as Solomon died, his impoverished subjects were overtaken and captured, to become slaves to others spread throughout the region.

Today we live in a culture here in the United States that is one of the wealthiest in the world. We have the freedom to practice any religion – or no religion – as we choose. We may not all start out with the same advantages of birthright or location, but with effort we can overcome hardship and live lives of honor and reliability. Our elected leaders may be as flawed as Solomon, but we can still take care of our neighbors and provide for the needy as individuals within this land.

We don't have a king here in America. There are nations around the world that do. Some are selfish despotic leaders, while others are benevolent and responsible for their citizens' welfare. But whether we Christians live in a nation with or without a wise ruler, we all have one king and that is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Unlike earthly rulers, our king will never let us down. Jesus is the timeless ruler of all that exists. His reign is eternal and always dependable. He gathers the disheartened within his embrace and his wisdom guides those who honor him. If we are fearful because of the irresponsibility of others, Jesus provides a strong anchor in the storm. Through happiness and hardship, our king is beside us – not removing what threatens us but providing us the wisdom and courage we need to persevere. We choose our own paths, free to make decisions based on our own experience. But as loving Christians, with Christ as our guide, let us make those decisions as He would, calling on His wisdom to inform our every step. Amen