

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Interpretation(s)

Hebrew Bible Lesson

1 Kings 3:3-14 (NRSV)

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar. ⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' ⁶And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, '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, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. ¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.'

Bible/Sermon Focus

This week's scripture reading happens at the beginning of Solomon's reign in ancient Israel. As he took the throne, the Lord offered to give him anything. Solomon first affirmed the steadfast love of God in his life, and then asked for an "understanding mind," for the ability to discern good and evil. Indeed, King Solomon's reputation today (aside from having 700 wives and 300 concubines) is one of wisdom; he is known as "Solomon the Wise."

For Wesleyan Christians, Scripture is the primary source for theological reflection. And at the same time, Methodists have always valued the human capacity for reason, the ability to think and understand. For John Wesley, "It is a fundamental principal with us (the Methodists) that to renounce reason is to renounce revelation, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion." (Letter to Thomas Rutherford, 1768)

In the second week of the series, "Live In Love: What's Next for the United Methodist Church," we tackled the verses of Scripture that some people interpret as condemning romantic relationships among people of the same gender. These verses are known collectively as the "clobber verses," because they have been wielded as weapons to exclude members of the LGBTQ+ community from full inclusion in the church.

Pastor J.J. Warren writes, "To be told that we are welcome to worship and pay into the offering, yet kept from serving God in this Church is not only unwelcoming and insulting, it's unjust." (Where Do We Go From Here, p. 190) For decades, this is exactly what has been happening to LGBTQ+ Christians in the United Methodist Church, and these harmful actions are informed by a particular interpretation of the handful of "clobber texts."

When we open ourselves to the revelation of God that comes through reason, we can approach these scripture passages in a spirit of discernment, with an "understanding mind," leaving aside the preconceived notions we carry about "what the Bible says." Historical context, literary analysis, and accurate translation of the original languages all come into play if we truly desire to grow deeper in our relationship with God.

And when we consider the "clobber verses" in this light, it is clear to see that there are other ways to interpret them, interpretations that do not condemn consensual, mutually respectful, romantic relationships among people of the same gender. The question then becomes not "What does the Bible say?" but rather "How do you interpret what the Bible says? And why?"

In the sermon, Pastor Andy talked about not only knowing what you believe, but understanding why you believe it. The Holy Bible speaks plainly about many things, love being at the top of that list. "The greatest of these is love," after all. And so, when this handful of obscure texts is interpreted, they need to be studied through the lens of love.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it important for you to know why you believe what you believe?
2. Reflect on this idea of John Wesley's: "...all irrational religion is false religion."
3. How have you witnessed the so-called "clobber verses" being discussed in the church?
4. Has your interpretation of these six or seven passages changed over time? How so?
5. Share your thoughts about the United Methodist Church's prohibitions on same-sex marriage and ordination of LGBTQ+ people.

Prayer

God of our ancestors, God of our future, help us to live in love more each day. Thank you for the gift of wisdom, through which we interpret your holy word. Thank you for the ability to think and the capacity for reason. Reveal to us more and more each day, more of who you are, more of who you want us to be. **Amen.**

Why do you believe what you believe?