

Divided

1 Kings 3:4-9 [10-15] 16-28

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.

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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 toward 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 honor 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." 15Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.]

16Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. 17The one woman said, "Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. 18Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. 19Then this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. 20She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. 21When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne." 22But the other woman said, "No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours." The first said, "No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine." So they argued before the king. 23Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; while the other says, 'Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.'" 24So the king said, "Bring me a sword," and they brought a sword before the king. 25The king said, "Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other." 26But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—"Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!" The other said, "It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it." 27Then the king responded: "Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother." 28All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.

Good morning, church. In order to ground and settle our bodies, let's inhale deeply and exhale with a hum. Inhale. And hum. Let's pray: Gracious God we sit in the silence and beauty of your creation deeply grateful for our lives. Calm us now, O

Lord, into a quietness that heals and listens. Open wounded hearts to the balm of your Word. Speak to us in clear tones so that we might feel our spirits leap for joy and skip with hope as we witness to your boundless love. Amen.

If letting go would keep the precious thing alive, wouldn't we let go? If Solomon took a sword and declared, "Divide the living child in two..." wouldn't we, burning with compassion cry out like this prostitute, this mother, "Please my lord, give her the living [child]; certainly, do not kill [the living thing]. We are, after all, compassionate people, and we *easily* see ourselves in the person of this woman willing to let go of her child. But good storytelling and good theology, always, always asks us to try on the skin of the other characters...especially the ones we find most offensive.

I didn't do that last week, church. I let David have it, which was fine... but...I failed to help us all ask the question...where is the David in me? I did what many of us all too easily do...I sat, separate and apart, some might say high and mighty, divided from David, divided from the David in me. I thought, "There's no way I (drag this out), Adriene Thorne, would *ever* send messengers to get someone...never! Never? Maybe not exactly the way David did it, but in my own way...and that's where we get in trouble. That's where we dissociate ourselves from the people we don't like and from our own weaknesses. Because given the right circumstances, most people are capable of most things. Where is the David in me?

I come to this morning's text a bit humbled because I want to complexify and not simplify this book we love and what it means to be human, what it means to strive to follow the God

we love. I invite you this morning into a deep interrogation of your self-perceived goodness and your division from your shadow side. You are invited to join me in a deep examination of our division from those we have deemed reprobate, flawed, not us.

It's easy, church, to side with and identify with the compassionate woman in the text and it's dangerous...it's dangerous to believe we are only good and that we couldn't possibly be the other woman...the one who says, "[The precious living thing] shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it," kill it, burn the whole thing down. The uncomfortable question for this moment, (?) with the home break in and attack on Paul Pelosi, in this Covid moment, this Trump moment, this pre-election moment...the *juicy* question for this moment is, where and when are we like the people we don't like? When and

where are we like this woman...this woman who would blithely let the living child die? When have we been **willing** to kill the living ideas or movements in society, in politics, in our families, in the church, in ourselves?

I have a colleague who started a feeding ministry during the Covid lockdown, and like most clergy he had a handful of people nipping at his heels for no seemingly good reason. Eventually, he was able to convince the majority of the elders that the church has a mandate to feed hungry people and the ministry got going with a huge assist from the neighborhood. The ministry grew, it was recognized locally and nationally, it even won some awards, but most importantly it served a **great** hunger in this church's neighborhood particularly among seniors who live on fixed incomes and among nannies and delivery drivers who, in his context, were largely people of

color. Recently, my colleague, retired and he got word that the disgruntled leaders were making another effort to shut the feeding ministry down. These folks along with church leadership that won't stand up to them, are willing to let the living thing die. "[It] shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it," kill it, burn the whole thing down.

Here's another example that might give us all a lot to chew on. I don't of course know your political leanings, church, whether you are a conservative, a progressive or an independent voter, perhaps some here don't vote at all – though, I pray...that everyone is registered to vote in these upcoming elections. Regardless, you might remember that there was great division during the 2016 presidential election, and it was of a flavor that we've not seen in recent history. Very little nuance coupled with a great deal of division from those

deemed reprobate, deplorable, flawed, not us. And these dangerous attitudes made us all extremely brittle. It was difficult to be supple, to flow, to open or change our minds and hearts. In fact, we locked in on our particular candidates in the primaries with such vigor, that when there was one candidate left standing, if it wasn't our candidate of choice, we couldn't possibly embrace them. Now I'll just talk about my people, the ones I'm most closely aligned with for better or for worse...progressives. Progressives demonized the woman candidate for president sometimes with more vigor and vitriol than her opposition. Some progressives refused to turn up and vote. Some wrote in other candidates. Anyone but that woman. "[It] shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it," kill it, burn the whole thing down. And as quiet as its kept, as poorly interrogated as it has been, progressives played a role in the

ascendancy of the other candidate. And for four years we all paid the price, and we continue to pay the price. A conservative supreme court for the rest of our lifetimes is part of the price of that division. The destruction of a pregnant persons right to choose...part of the price. Fading access to the vote...part of the price. A border wall, child separations and inhumane treatment of current asylum seekers...all part of the price. Anyone but the woman. “[It] shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it,”

Something precious and living died in 2016. And it died because some of us erroneously believed we were only good and couldn’t possibly be the sort of person who would **allow** a precious thing to die.

Here’s the thing, church, and I know you know this...the folks we despise often live in us. The people we separate ourselves from and divide our lives from...they’re us. One

commentator suggests the reason these two women are unnamed and spoken of in the text in such a way that you nearly lose track of who is who...that is intentional, so that we might see ourselves in both women, so that we might take a long view and ask ourselves a different set of questions. And not the question: which woman is compassionate, and which one is not, who is a democrat and who is a republican? Who voted for my candidate and who did not? Those are not helpful questions...not helpful questions if you want to close a divide...but what about these questions...how did these women come to be divided? What is the context for these women? Better yet, what are they afraid of? And one of my all-time favorite questions, what do the women need? We have to ask better questions, church, and we have to be thinking people of

faith in order to better interrogate these texts, in order to find the life and the good news in them for a variety of people.

Two women prostitutes living in the same house...that says to us there is no male figure to provide for their safety and care. That's important to acknowledge...that's critical. There were no jobs for women in the ancient near east and so selling their bodies was a survival strategy for both of these women. These are two sisters, with no options, trying to survive... well that adds some new layers to the story! Their context meant there was no husband, father, brother, son. No power. It meant no food and it meant no shelter. You see how context helps us to ask better questions?! Good questions stretch the lens and help us see that the story is so much bigger than who is the mother and who is not, so much bigger than who is compassionate and who is a monster. Take a deep breath.

The women likely owned nothing, not even their own bodies and so they went to the only place they could think of to get justice...and Solomon gets the job done. He susses out who the true mother is and renders a wise judgement, but... there is still all that context to deal with. The women get a judgement but do either of them or the child really get justice? No. The answer is no. So, the question, dare I say, the good news, is you... what are you going to do with all that context? Because both these women are us, and they are the people we love and the people we struggle to love. What will you do to ensure they get justice and healing and equity and a transformed future? Because God expects those with position and power, like Solomon, like most of us in this country, to do something about the context for widows and orphans and marginalized people...to do something about the division that separates us.

There is an election coming up. Please vote.

There is a fall Covid booster out. Please talk to your doctor about getting that vaccine and doing your part to shift the context for vulnerable neighbors.

Asylum seekers, from Mexico, have been bussed to NYC and there are ways to serve, ways to close the divide. Go to the church website and sign up to be a greeter, to serve meals, or to donate items.

Education often acts as a counter to division, and there are a wealth of opportunities for education, formation, and transformation also on the church website. Check them out.

Finally, church, ***please*** don't underestimate the importance of caring for your own body, mind, and spirit. We didn't begin with movement this morning, but I'd like to end

with movement. This will be a challenge for some of you but give yourself the good gift of tending to your body so that you are better able to support other bodies in shifting their context and closing the spaces that divide us. Here's the movement piece: 3 options, walking, stretching or laying down. Walking, stretching or laying down. I'm going to share a prayer from Rebecca Parker and Option One: you are free to get up and walk around this gorgeous space. Option Two: You are free to stay in your seat and stretch. Option Three: you are free to lay down and stretch your body as these words wash over you. I hope you will move while we pray...

Your gifts—whatever you discover them to be—
can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power,

the strength of the hands,

the reaches of the heart,

the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting

Any of these can serve to feed the hungry,

bind up wounds,

welcome the stranger,

praise what is sacred,

do the work of justice

or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door,

hoard bread,

abandon the poor,

obscure what is holy,

comply with injustice

or withhold love.

You must answer this question:

What will you do with your gifts?

Choose to bless the world.

The choice to bless the world is more than an act of will,

a moving forward into the world

with the intention to do good.

It is an act of recognition,

a confession of surprise,

a grateful acknowledgment

that in the midst of a broken world

unspeakable beauty, grace and mystery abide.

There is an embrace of kindness

that encompasses all life, even yours.

And while there is injustice, anesthetization, or evil

there moves a holy disturbance,

a benevolent rage,

a revolutionary love,

protesting, urging, insisting

that which is sacred will not be defiled.

Those who bless the world live their life

as a gesture of thanks

for this beauty

and this rage.

The choice to bless the world can take you into solitude

to search for the sources

of power and grace;

native wisdom, healing, and liberation.

More, the choice will draw you into community,

the endeavor shared,

the heritage passed on,

the companionship of struggle,

the importance of keeping faith,

the life of ritual and praise,

the comfort of human friendship,

the company of earth

the chorus of life welcoming you.

None of us alone can save the world.

Together—that is another possibility, waiting.

To God be the glory.

Invocation

God of Glory, the rallying cry of the Reformation, that we commemorate today, says the church is *reformed and [always] reforming, according to the Word of God*. Marking this day in our shared life together, let us not so much celebrate the past but recommit ourselves to your mission and ministry in the present. There is yet reforming work to be done. Thank you, mighty God, for being with us on the way and for guiding our next faithful step. In Jesus name we pray.