

The Judgment of Solomon
I Kings 3:16-28
Colebrook Congregational Church
May 14, 2017 / 5th Sunday of Easter / Mother's Day

There are a bunch of stories that transcend many cultures and are rather widespread. A modern example is Stone Soup, but from earlier times, there is the story I told months ago about the Long Spoons, with its many variations; there is the story of the Flood, told by every culture in the ancient near east; and there is today's story, the Judgment of Solomon, which uses an absurd method to determine who is the true mother of a baby.

The variations of this story span from the frescoes in Pompeii, that involve pygmies; to Greece, with intense logical arguments; to India, where Buddha unveils a trickster demigod through a suggested tug-of-war; to China's *Chalk Circle* that also uses a tug-of-war. They all involve the same themes of a kidnapped child, one person's word against another's, and a wise person using an emotional method to discern who truly loves the child. Even though there are all these variants, it is this account of Solomon that is the oldest recorded version.

I have spoken often about the history of Israel. How after the Hebrews escaped from Egypt, wandered in the desert, and then were just a confederation of tribes until they asked God for a king because the Philistines and a guy named Goliath was waging war. Along comes David, who slew Goliath, and later became king, and then had a son named Solomon, who was famed for being wise, wrote the wisdom proverbs in the Bible, and according to the movies, had some mines in Africa.

So, two women appear before Solomon to present their cases about who is the true mother. At issue here is that there are no witnesses. The two women are of the same social status, live in the same home by themselves, and cannot provide evidence to prove themselves over the other. Solomon didn't have anything to go on.

Because of this, King Solomon came up with an insane solution to try to figure who was telling the truth. If they were arguing about property, or about pie, then the method of cutting something in half would make sense.

Our parents may have used that method with us, even. Maybe those parents here have used this method to solve conflicts.

Well, this method shocks the women into two types of responses. A response of love that favors life for the child against a response that insisted on one's legal right. So, love for the child made the real mother concede the case. The real mother is willing to give up her rights so that the child may live. The true mother is the one who chooses life over death, and love over right.

This pretty much defines motherhood. Lovingly giving of themselves to ensure the survival of their offspring.

I recently saw a video of man on a Bangkok street. He gave a very skinny dog what looked like a drumstick. Instead of eating the meat, the dog took off. The man followed the dog through streets and alleys and they end up in a little courtyard like space. The dog realized that she was followed and gave the man some side eye. But then a pack of puppies erupted onto the scene and the mama dog gave them the food. The man realized what happened, that she was a mother who was forgoing food for herself, to make sure her puppies were able to eat, and he gave them the rest of his food.

That's what mothers do. They see to the safety and comfort of their children before seeing to their own. And a lot of times, they do so without anyone knowing what they have done, which isn't why they do it. They do it out of love. They do this for us without fanfare, without nearly enough gratitude or appreciation, so we should make sure that we all show the same love to our mothers that they have already shown to us our whole lives.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

O God with a mother's heart, You gather us as Your children and You comfort and hold us in your warm embrace. Like a mother, Your love surrounds and supports us, in good times and in tough, in the midst of joy and pain, always and everywhere; we know that You will never leave nor abandon us. We thank You this day, for all the mothers in our lives. Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

[PAUSE]

O God who welcomes all in love, to You we pray for the good of Your church, our community, and the concerns of those in need. We lift up our hearts in faith to You, the one who hears all prayers and holds close all of Creation.

Thank you for our mothers, who have given us life and love. And we give You thanks for all Your gifts to us—for daily food, for health, for each breath we take, and for the gifts of Your word, Your power and Your love.

You know our faults and yet You promise to forgive. Help us to face up to ourselves, so that, as You move toward us in mercy, we may repent, turn to You, and receive mercy.

We pray for those in need—those who hunger or are homeless. We pray for those in pain—the abused, brokenhearted and lonely. We pray for the sick in body and in mind, and for those who grieve. For the life of our community and all those who put their trust in You for all our presents and all our futures, and we pray that Your lovingkindness to the world be offered through our hands, our words, our deeds, & our hearts.

We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, to better understand the witness of Your Followers. We ask that You comfort us when we are afraid or in need. Give us the strength to live with the courage to overcome all obstacles. Fill us with Your Spirit and make us living carriers of of Your Love to all who need it. Ignite our Hearts to act as You want us to do, and help us to recognize the needs of our neighbors.

We especially pray for:

The Suddath Family

Deanna Muzzulin

Sean Larose

Family of Greg Roberts

Gracious God, we offer these prayers and all those of our hearts up to you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

I Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. ‘There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and on them he has set the world. ‘He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed.’

I Kings 3:16-28

Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. 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. Then 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. Then this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. She 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. When 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.’ But 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.

Then the king said, ‘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.”’ So the king said, ‘Bring me a sword’, and they brought a sword before the king. The king said, ‘Divide the living boy in two; then give half to one, and half to the other.’ But 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.’ Then the king responded: ‘Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.’ All Israel heard of the judgement 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.