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# Imperfect yet Loved

**Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 18 August 2024**

1 Kings 3:3-14 • Ephesians 5:15-20 • John 6:51-58

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

One of the amazing things about God is that God uses all of us to further his plans. We humans fall far short of perfection: we argue and we fight and we kill each other; we don't remain faithful to God; we follow other "gods", sometimes literally and sometimes figuratively, such as money or power. You'd think we wouldn't be very good raw material for God to use as servants.

God is using me right now — and I pray that I am worthy. God uses me to bring a message from the Bible to you all every week in this church. Am I a great theologian or a great preacher? Goodness no — at least, on my own I am not. But when inspired and guided by God, I may do God's will. To some that would sound like pious bragging, but it's the way God's world works. And all of you are the same. You all serve God's kingdom on earth. We all serve God

in spite of our flaws, our sins, our wrongdoings. And that is the way God wants it.

The story of King Solomon is one of the great stories of the Bible. He was the son of King David and the woman Bathsheba. Solomon was the wisest man on earth: his “wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kings 4:30). He is remembered for his famous decision regarding the two women who both claimed a child as their own. He entertained the Queen of Sheba and amazed her with his riches and accomplishments. He built the temple, a home for God, as God ordained in the days of King David.

All his wisdom was given him by God, because, as we heard in our first reading, that’s what Solomon asked for. God came to him in a dream and offered to give him anything he asked for. And God was pleased, because Solomon did not ask for great riches, or the defeat of his enemies, or make any other selfish request. He asked for wisdom — as the Bible tells us:

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.” (1 Kings 3:10-14)

And so we are a bit surprised later on in the Bible to find how Solomon has fallen away from wisdom and — more importantly — from worshipping God exclusively. In Chapter 11 of 1 Kings we read:

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. (1 Kings 11:4-6)

This is after he accomplished his great feat of building God’s temple, which is described in great detail in several chapters of this book. As a result of his faithlessness, God takes the kingdom away from Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam’s ruthlessness then leads to the splitting of the kingdom into two separate states, Israel and Judah.

One may think that God’s action here is a breaking of the covenant God made with King David. God had told David, through a dream of the prophet Nathan,

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Samuel 7:16). But promises of God require something of the receiver of the promise as well — namely, faith. Solomon broke faith with God when he began following the foreign gods Ashtoreth and Molek, and so the promise, as far as Solomon and his children were concerned, was void. But in a greater sense, God actually fulfilled the promise, for the line of David continued right down to the birth of Jesus Christ, often called Son of David.

All this history is quite fascinating when you get into it. And we see all through it that God continues to choose imperfect people to carry out his will. The Bible itself is the direct product of imperfect men. I say “direct” because men did write it, but they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is because of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration that we know the Bible is true. No one alone could write such a revelation of the nature of God; it could only have been done through the Spirit. But each writer brought a bit of his own character into the writing as well.

It is just as well that God can use imperfect human beings to carry out his will, for after all, there are no perfect ones around. Jesus was the only one who was without sin. When we look around us today, we sometimes wonder where God’s hand is at work, and through whom. It is risky to say that this person or that one is God’s instrument. Christians sometimes identify politicians as doing God’s work, and certainly politicians are as imperfect as the rest of us! Yet it could be true — anyone might be chosen by God. Perhaps we’re all doing God’s work, some more actively or obviously than others.

We all seem to have become more critical of each other, and especially of our public figures. Every error or sin, no matter how minor or how long ago committed, is dragged into the headlines and used against a person. We certainly saw it in the recent NZ election, and in the current US one. Should we perhaps be more tolerant of the sins of others, on the principle that God might be using that person for some good purpose? It makes me think of Paul’s admonition: “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2). Perhaps we could also say, “Be careful not to judge others too hastily: for you may thereby be judging God’s servants.”

In the name of our Holy and Gracious God, who sees our sins and yet loves us anyway. Amen.