

Sermon Notes: June 27, 2021 **Focus:** The Apocrypha & The Wisdom of Solomon
[Lectionary Readings](#)

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23 *God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal. God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity.*

I have only vaguely known that *The Wisdom of Solomon* exists. So today's reading feels like a surprise breath of fresh air. It serves as a counterpoint to "The Fall" where Adam's sin in Genesis made all of us hopelessly corrupt. As a result, this corruption demanded Jesus' death. The hardcore version of this idea is "Substitutionary Atonement" (SA). SA espouses that God needed Jesus to die in order to pay for our (and Adam's) sins. Jesus' death had to happen in order to bring us back to life.

A softened version of SA is that we are broken. However, Jesus chooses to live his cross-shaped life inside our hearts to make us whole. I have long been a soft SA guy. But lately, I am not so sure that I was born hopelessly corrupt either way. Have I done corrupt things needing forgiveness? Absolutely. Is my every thought so debased that I need the cross before me 365/24/7? Not so much.

I don't think either soft or hard SA is *essential* to having a living and breathing relationship with God and Jesus. Particularly problematic is the way SA is practiced. For decades, I heard from inside the church that my life is like a discarded mannequin. In fact, my sin is so bad that God had to kill his son for me. Only after this blood libel is paid, could God's son have the ability to pull me off the rubbish heap to make me worthy. It can be exhausting to think that only Jesus is able to accept how hopelessly broken you are, but still deigns to love you.

These days, I want to know that I am a good egg just because I exist. I *need* to have value simply because I breath in and breath out. Thinking differently about SA won't destroy the power of God's embrace. The text today says that God "created all things so that they might exist."

Ana Marie Cox is a political columnist, alcoholic and depressive who is finding her intrinsic value. She taps into the Wisdom of Solomon well, albeit inadvertently. She says in a panel discussion:

I think a big part of my recovery was actually divorcing myself from my work to a certain extent and to feel like I had value if I never wrote another thing in my life, if I never (pause)... the nods are making me feel better... You know *if I just continued to exist my value on this planet would be as much as it would be if I wrote another book* (applause) that's true for every single person in this room.
<https://www.hilariousworld.org/episode/2018/10/29/the-hilarious-night-of-depression> (Minute 35, my italics added)

Misery is striving to achieve something that we already have. We are breathing, lovely beings, full stop. We are, as the Solomon text says, the *image of his own eternity*. Do I really believe this? Heck, no. But I pray to be content just breathing, with nothing to prove, and bearing the image of eternity.

From personal to educational - Apocrypha Every now and then, you will hear a scripture being read in church that even the title seems unfamiliar. Even if you don't know a thing about "The Apocrypha," you can tell when a text from The Apocrypha is being read. At the end of the reading in church, the lector will (hopefully) make this awkward statement: "here ends the reading." We don't know if we should respond with "thanks be to God" or nothing. Nothing is the right answer. The wisdom of Solomon in today's reading will have that awkward ending. For clarity's sake, "apocryphal" is an adjective broadly meaning hidden. "The Apocrypha" (noun) is a collection of texts that span a 400-year period between the last Old Testament prophets and the New Testament. Here are what I think are the two greatest hits:

Tobit is a book in the Apocrypha For Bible study a couple of years ago, I subjected the Wednesday group to the whole book of Tobit. It was an interesting ride whose memory would make them scratch their heads still. In the story, Tobit is a diligent undertaker for his slain countrymen. This practice gains him the ire of an Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who is the one producing Tobit's slain compatriots. The king exiles Tobit from his Hebrew homeland. In exile, a bird poops in his eyes and he goes blind! His son, Tobias, then goes on a journey accompanied by an angel.

A series of events leads the son, Tobias, to catch a fish with a magical gallbladder, heart and liver (more later). Tobias meets his future wife Sarah, who had killed off seven previous husbands because she's demon possessed. Tobias waits until after the wedding before burning the magical heart and liver as incense to drive the demon away. They have lots of parties because the angel / fish healed Sarah; therefore, marital bliss abounds. Tobit, the dad, regains his sight later and the wedding party just goes and goes. The angel leaves and happily ever after.

This is a folktale, but it beautifully tackles central human questions. Why suffering? Who cares if you are righteous? Does religion even matter? Those are questions worth holding close as we practice our faith.

2 Maccabees First 1 & 2 Maccabees are the inspiration behind the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. The whole of the Maccabees story is about the Jewish people coming together to be victorious in the face of overwhelming opposition. Chapter 8 of 2 Maccabees is a particularly gory story about integrity. This chapter highlights what it means to stand up for your principles. In the story, a Roman ruler, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, arrests a particular mother with seven sons, they are arrested for keeping kosher. This ruler is so offended by Jewish purity practice that he tortures and murders the sons one by one in front of their mother because they refused to eat pork. She dies too. "How much are your principles worth" is the question that hangs over the story.

In the Episcopal Church, we rarely read these texts in church. We only read Judith, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach (occasional Sundays, Easter Vigil [optional] and Mary Magdalene's day). There are only 15 individual readings that come up through the three cycle. Then the lectionary starts over, and we read through the same 15 again. There are a couple of choices in weddings and funerals too. If you want know when the Apocrypha is read, go here: <http://www.lectionarypage.net/ReverseLectionary.html> 80% of this Apocryphal reading cycle comes from the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach. Only two lections come from Baruch and one comes from Judith.

Todd