

1 Kings 3:16-27

Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷ The 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Then this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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." ²² 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. ²³ Then 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.'" ²⁴ So the king said, "Bring me a sword," and they brought a sword before the king. ²⁵ The king said, "Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other." ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ Then the king responded: "Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother."

Exegesis

- This text is offered as a testament to Solomon's wisdom. In the preceding verses he asks God for wisdom and then we read this story. Their lives are not reflected on and their names are not even mentioned because in the text they seem to be a footnote in Solomon's life. Only because of him have they made it into the annals of the Kings.
- These women are of the lowest status. Something went wrong to find themselves in this situation. Most women were sustained as part of a family unit. In order for them to find themselves in prostitution we know that either they were rejected by their family, they were widowed or their family fell on hard times and were not able to provide for them.
- These boy children are their chance at respectability and a place back into society. If their sons can grow up and get work, they will be able to take care of them in old age. They might just receive consideration as a mother that they have not gotten as women.
- The death of this child is not simply about the love for this baby but also the loss of future redemption and security.
- We don't really know what happened.
- Regardless of what happened in the night, we know that when the time comes to decide what should happen to the child.
 - One was motivated by loss - get my just due
 - One was motivated by love - put the baby first - sacrificial love - she didn't just speak of love she showed what love looks like in action

What Can We Learn

We will all experience loss in our lives but when our decisions are driven by our fear of loss we tend to operate in destructive and divisive ways. Our country is increasingly motivated by loss and the fear of loss.

- Haunted by a growing feeling that our way of life is dying
- The American Dream is in question
- Our sense of physical security is threatened by the pandemic that has killed thousands
- There is no sense of decency in how we treat each other
- Many of us are trying to figure out who to blame. There are those who blame immigrants, Jews, poor people, Muslims, police protestors, socialists or President Obama. Then there are those of us who feel the country has been ruined by President Trump, the Supreme Court, the Christian Right, Russia, Joe Rogan, anti-vaccers. On both sides people are frustrated and angry and looking to best the other side.

We saw this play out in the 2016 Election

- One person spoke to the loss and told us to blame “bad hombres” and Muslim terrorists
- Another person told us to be scared of the first person and his band of “deplorables”
- We were two sides fearful of the status quo and fearful of regression
- Neither believing that love could lead us on

Do we even know what it is to be motivated by Love?

- When was the last time we had a vision of what was possible and we felt motivated to do something to change our communities or our country. Some of us have placed our hope in political leaders. We have knocked doors or raised money to elect someone, but then we have often gone back to our lives expecting that person to “fix things.”
- Being motivated by love means reaching out to those people who are on the margins of our lives and communities.
- When was the last time that you connected with someone from a different political background?
- In how many state houses or community organizations are people working across the urban/ rural divide to find economic solutions that lift up both communities?
- Are our churches places where people come together across racial and class divides?
- Many of us are deeply troubled by the state of our nation but we have gotten so used to the deep divisions that we have acquiesced to the idea that we can cut our baby down the middle and we just hope to get 51% of the baby rather than asking how we come to a solution that saves our future
- We talk about hope and change but how do we live these values in these divided times?
- We have all heard the saying that talk is cheap. In the hip hop generation we say don't talk about it be about it.

In a time when things have reached such a contentious point. Where people are turning to violence to solve their problems. We have an opportunity to be the voice of love. To follow the example of Jesus and being willing to let go of our own interests in the name of saving the future.

Moving Beyond The Either Or

- We could end our analysis by being glad that the “loving mother” won, but this is a limited vision of the possibility because only one was the “winner” and little conversation about what led to the death of the other infant.
- We must question a system that left both mothers and children so vulnerable. We must call out the injustice that two new mothers were left to face the early days of their child’s lives by themselves. Even if we fight to save the one child we have to call for a communal conversation about our collective responsibility for the death of the other child. Where were the midwives, the grandmothers, the ministers and the grocers who should have come alongside these families? The shame of this death should not be shared only by these women but by the entire community who God commanded to care for the vulnerable.
- And was it best for this child to be returned to only the one mother? This child was born into a difficult situation; no doubt they faced poverty, shame and instability. This one mother would be once again by herself caring for a newborn. Would he not have been better off with the love and support of both women? Were there not others in Solomon’s court whose hearts should have been moved to provide support?
- As people of faith we must know that God wants better and that we are called to stand with our brothers and sisters helping to fill their needs even as God has provided for us. How can we stand with the vulnerable so that no mother loses her child.

In this moment of great uncertainty and conflict, people of faith must call for a vision driven by abundance. We must believe and live from the deep knowledge that God has given the human race more than enough to survive. It is true that some of us are taking more than our fair share while others are struggling to survive. It is true that there are many challenging situations to which there seem to be no hope of change. But we must stand for the idea that if we make decisions based on what God calls us to - if we live by the best of who we are then there really is enough. The Creator did not create a planet in which we have to choose between human flourishing and planet stability.

During this Black history month we must remember that so many of the injustices that have been faced by people of African descent are the result of slavery and colonialism. The flourishing of white male landowners was built on the backs of stolen Black labor. The riches created by slavery created the resources for towns like Lincoln to be built and may even have funded the very beams of this church. This country, our country, built on land that was stewarded by Native Americans stripped of their right to be in the land of their ancestors - it has always operated from the idea of individual freedom, often minimizing opportunities for resource-sharing in a way that reflect God’s abundance.

Even as we know great crimes have been committed, that we live in a world where babies die because they were born in the wrong zip code, with the wrong color skin, we are not willing to re-think whether we should let go of our privilege to create more justice for us all.

Even as we are tempted to rejoice because “our side” was rewarded with the baby, we must heed the words of the American prophet Dr. Martin Luther King who reminds us - “**We are caught** in an inescapable network of **mutuality**, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

We are called to reject the notion that we have to choose between the thriving of one group or another. Things may not be easy. We will have conflict but as children of God we must reject any calls to throw anyone under the bus and we must stand for the radical belief that we serve a God who can help us to build a world where justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.

As I close this morning I offer you these three questions for reflection -

1. Where do you see yourself motivated by loss and fear? How do concerns about your own safety and stability stop you from pursuing more justice in your world? Where does fear push you towards the status quo and away from more creative solutions?
2. Where do you see a Spirit of love operating in your life or in your community? How can you lean into that space and grow it so that it offers a path forward for you and others?
3. Facing loss and growing love is not easy. What spiritual practices have helped you to be vulnerable to lament or to take risks to love? How can you be more consistent in that practice or try new practices that might help you go deeper?