

MDP

1 Kings 3:5-9 / Matthew 13:31-33

Remember, MCWs cannot vote at GA. When you put your PIF together, make sure you study the CIFs of the congregations you're considering carefully. The GLPBY wants you to submit your MDP for approval to COM.

Presbyterians are notorious for this kind of shorthand-speak. It's almost like a secret language, or better, a gameshow, called "Know Your Acronyms." The challenge is to pay close attention because our denomination keeps moving the goal posts all the time. As soon as you think you have figured it out and mastered the acronym table, they come up with a new lineup.

Take the CIF, for example, which I just mentioned. CIF used to stand for "Church Information Form." It was kind of a church resume, if you will. A way for a particular congregation to tell a potential candidate for ministry who they are, and which ministries are important to them. Our APNC—sorry, here I go again—our *Associate Pastor Nominating Committee*, can tell you their tale of woe with this, as they now have to switch from a CIF to an MDP—a *Ministry Discernment Profile*. It's a rather lengthy, complicated document, and each APNC in Presbyterian history have ripped their hair out in this process. In other words, be kind to the folks serving in this important capacity and keep them in your daily prayers. I am very serious about this!

I always liked King Solomon. Not because he was king. Not because of his riches nor his rumored 1,000 concubines. I always admired him because he was wise beyond his years, even as a young man. And I admire him for keeping things simple. When God came to him in a dream and asked him what he desired most, Solomon did not draw up a lengthy scroll, documenting every want, wish, and desire he ever had. He did not scribble all the things on a piece of parchment that his father, King David, bequeathed to him as a job description for an Israelite king. Instead, he gave the LORD of heaven and earth an answer that was short and sweet: "God, give me a wise heart so I can be a good king for your people! Help me to discern between good and evil! I am just a child. I don't know how to wage war and play politics. So, please, help me!"

There are a few things I find remarkable in this story. First, although Solomon was only a child when God came to him in a dream, he was what we might call "an old soul" and wise beyond his years. He was fully aware that he lacked the gravitas necessary for a king who was to lead God's people. Second, Solomon

wanted to be a *good* king—not a powerful one, not a successful one, but a *good* king. He confessed that he did not know “how to go out or to come in,” which means he was not familiar with warfare and violence. After all, his name, Solomon, is a derivative of the word “shalom”—peace. And third, being a good king meant for him to be an advocate for God’s people. Not just for *his* people. For *God’s* people. Which means that Solomon was clearly aware of his limitations and his job description, which was the same job description for all the Israelite kings that had come before him: An Israelite king was not to be amassing power and wealth for his own gain. A good Israelite king was to be the shepherd of his people, one who was to take care of the “poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.”

I think King Solomon’s example provides us with a faithful way to figure out our own path with God and God’s people: Our own *MDP*, our own *Ministry Discernment Profile*, if you will, how to best love God and neighbor. When we discern which politician to vote for, we would do well to keep Solomon’s simple criteria in mind: Do they, want to be a *good* politician who is aware of their limitations and do they want to be an advocate for God’s people—which means for *all* people, especially the “poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger?” Or are they merely interested in money, influence, and power? When churches elect pastors, elders, and deacons, they would do well to discern whether they have the interests of the entire congregation at heart, and not merely a faction of it. When we discern what to do in our own lives, we might want to ask ourselves how our decisions benefit God’s people along with our own wants, wishes, and desires.

And, finally, can we then look at our politicians, our pastors, deacons, elders, and ourselves, and evaluate our “ministry discernment profile,” our way of being in this God’s world, on the basis of Solomonic questions such as: How are our decisions going to affect others for good or ill? Are our decisions contributing to “warfare and violence” or to peace, justice, and equity for all of God’s people?

And our “ministry discernment profile” goes beyond people. Jesus’s parable of the mustard seed is a case study in what it means “to live by a wise heart.” The sower, the human actor, has one part and one part only in this parable. They sow the seed. That’s it. Apparently, he or she was wise enough to know that every seed is significant because it contains life within it. In order for the life to unfold, it needs to be left alone. It does not need constant attention.

The sower also knew that it was best to get out of the way if the seed were to unfold its life. One of my mentors used to say, “The best thing you can do in ministry is to get out of the way.” This means we are not always the focus of attention and are merely facilitators for things bigger than ourselves. Like Solomon, who knew that he was not experienced enough to lead a nation. For the sower in the parable, this meant that she was less important than the tree into which the mustard seed would grow to provide shelter for nesting birds.

And finally, this parable is set in a garden or a local field, which today we would call “our own backyard.” That’s where God’s kingdom can be found, both literally and figuratively speaking. It can be found in the generosity of nature—just look at the tomatoes and the peaches right now—and in the daily life and work of children, women, and men. If you need a guide for this, I recommend the syndicated columnist Margaret Renkl, who lives in Nashville, TN. She is an exquisite observer and learner of the natural world around her.

So, we can take on Solomon as a role model of what our MDP, our ministry discernment profile, might be and how we might go about serving God and all of God’s people. Or we might simply go with Jesus’s call to first seek God’s kingdom and everything else will fall into place. Solomon and Jesus both had wise hearts which pleased God a great deal. And I am sure, our wise hearts would do the same.

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