

I come in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Did you ever notice that some who offer advice do not follow it themselves? Forbes Magazine published an article about The Solomon Paradox. “King Solomon, known for his keen intellect and unmatched wisdom in guiding others, failed to apply wisdom in his own life, which ultimately led to the demise of his kingdom.” A study shows that if I advise myself from my own perspective, I am less likely to recognize the limits of my own knowledge. By removing my own personal interests from the situation, and look at it from an outsider’s perspective, I am more likely to advise myself with greater wisdom. For example, I can begin with the statement, “My child stole from me.” Or, I can begin with, “There was a parent whose child stole from them.” The resulting self-advice may look different, based on the beginning statements. By reframing the situation from being self-centered to that of an outside advisor, I am free to “walk in the shoes of another person,” whether in solidarity or in empathy. My personal baggage and emotions are put aside to leave more room for more perspectives, to ask more questions, and to even consider other options.

Jesus gave us advice. He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” I wonder if Jesus gave sound advice, and whether he fell into the Solomon Paradox trap?

After all, our modern world is entirely different than 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel. They didn't have political division, military conflicts, corrupt leadership, or racism, did they? Ok, maybe. They had equal rights and respect for life. Other than women and children were property, capital punishment was common, and the sick and unworthy were pushed outside of the city limits.

This itinerate preacher, Jesus of Nazareth advises others to have peace and not to have troubled hearts. Peace, in this context, means 'shalom,' to be healed and to be whole. He tells the disciples that this **peace comes with faith and obedience to God's word.** So here's the fine print. As an imperfect human, I am unable to consistently obey God's word, and I waver in faith. It sounds like, "Don't worry as long as you believe in God, and obey His word. Otherwise, it's been nice knowing you." Jesus says, "Don't be anxious or disquieted." Well, I'm anxious and disquieted. I'm not feeling good about this. And I still wonder if Jesus took his own advice.

In our Gospel today, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure through death. Theologian Rev Francis Moloney, writes, "This departure must not be the cause of consternation or fear as Jesus is returning to the Father to initiate an in-between-time marked by his absence, but the presence of the Holy Spirit will be with the disciples, continuing the revealing task of the absent Jesus." The Holy Spirit serves as an intercessor, source of Truth, a guide, comforter, and teacher.

Jesus is going away and coming back to them through the Spirit, opening the way to the Father. His parting gift to them? A peace that cannot be matched by anything the world can provide.

Moloney goes on to say, “Disciples who, abiding with the Holy Spirit, love Jesus and keep his commandments will come to know God, and His love. (fine print again). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, they will experience the life of love that unites the Father and the Son until Father and the Son come to abide with them.” On the last day leading us into Revelation.

The Book of Revelation is what it is. The author (attributed to John) is writing from the perspective of Christianity in the Roman Empire. He draws content from other apocalyptic writers such as Daniel, Enoch, Ezra, and Baruch. To him, the Roman Empire was the source of all evil (Satan). It’s beliefs, values, and practices were an insult to Christianity, and many, both Christians and non-Christians, were simply adapting to Roman life. John describes, in the most exuberant imagery, God’s restoration of Jerusalem, through His divine and brutal assault on evil. Like most apocalyptic literature, God’s wrath will render justice through plagues, violence, eternal suffering and annihilation. The pure and unblemished believers (those whose foreheads are labeled), will live in eternal joy. God’s heavy hand will condemn sinners to the eternal and unquenchable flames of hell. How’s that for Hell-fire and brimstone?

But if we step back a little, in both the New Testament and the Gospel, in and amongst the pyrotechnics, we hear words of abundant salvation and eternal joy. I know I am not perfect, but I am also not a serial killer. I'm more of a parking ticket kinda guy.

I don't meet the criteria of the New Jerusalem, but hell for a parking ticket seems severe. I know that I am not forced to heed Jesus' advice. I can choose to deny it or reject it, which results in the rejection of God's love – **by me, not by God.** I can't say that I deny or reject God's word, but I am just not able to meet perfection. Yet, I can count on the Holy Spirit abiding in me, seeking to draw me into truth, and nudging me into action by obeying his commandment of love. Amidst all of this uncertainty, Jesus advises, "Don't worry."

Theologian Rev Wilfrid Harrington writes, "God is too often a distant, forbidding figure, gravely offended by human sin, and unaffected by human suffering. God deserves better than this. He deserves the compliment of carefree trust in his graciousness. There is only one answer to evil, and wrath and violence cannot be the answer. Nothing but love, the infinitely patient divine love, can absorb evil and put it out of commission. The Cross shows the earnestness of a gracious God, and shows that **there is no limit** to his desire to win humankind to himself."

So, did Jesus follow his own advice? His advice to himself was the same wisdom he offered to us. He embraced it, and lived into it. In his solidarity with humankind, and unity with the Father, Jesus had the peace and trust that God had his back. It did not remove his trials and tribulations, but He knew he would be victorious in the end. His advice did not make it easier, but offered us his wisdom through the eyes of empathy, solidarity, new perspectives, but without compromise. Jesus never compromised the love of the Father. Jesus never compromised his integrity or message. As a matter of fact, Jesus stood steadfast on God's immeasurable love and truth. Jesus advised us to hear about his unity with the Father through the word, and to share in the love of that divine union at the Eucharistic table. When our minds and hearts are in unity with Jesus through Word and Sacrament, we are armed and equipped to absorb hate, adversity, injustice, exclusion, and even death with the infinite and profound love of God. Our job is to be faithful and trusting. Our job is to keep trying to live in the spirit of Truth. When we fail, we remember that we have a God that is full of forgiveness and mercy. So, my advice to you:

Ignore the fine print. Don't worry, be happy! Amen.