

Uncontainable Love

This week's readings are heavy on repetition, but light on plot details. Yet reading about the same events from two different sources reveals comfort in an unexpected way.

First of all, having a Temple for God was a monumental moment in Israel's history. Not only did this mean that the ancient Israelites had physical control of a territory and could therefore create a permanent building honoring God, but in the believers' mindset, this Temple was the one place where God lived on Earth. It was the only place where someone could be guaranteed to find God. The Temple served as the first direct line of communication between God and His people.

Given the amount of recorded detail of the Temple's dimensions and decorations, it would be fair to presume the builders were skilled, enthusiastic believers, working to create an Earthly place for God. However, 2 Chronicles 8:8 and 1 Kings 9:15 tell us that these workers were slaves -- people forced into conscripted labor. Yes, the same people whose history involved 400 years of their own enslavement building monuments to foreign gods decided to turn around and force conquered people to construct a building for their God.

Does it matter that the ancient Israelites' were using whatever means possible to serve the one, true God -- our God? It ought not to -- Solomon's use of forced labor is hardly indicative of the loving wisdom God gifted him with in 1 Kings 3 and 2 Chronicles 1. How can a man gifted by God with wisdom make a terrible choice?

And that gets to the point: We like our world in clear, distinct dichotomies. People, and especially our leaders, are either good or bad. We remember Solomon for his wisdom and the remarkable accomplishment of the Temple. Wisdom + building the Temple = Solomon is a good man and leader.

We choose not to remember that slaves built the beautiful Temple. We choose to ignore that Solomon married women who worshipped other gods, leading to his own idolatry. Slave labor + being unfaithful to God = Solomon is a bad man and terrible leader who helped bring about the ancient Israelites' exile.

Just as the ancient people perceived God to be constrained within a building, to be either in the building or in the world, we often project limitations onto each other. Solomon has to be either good or bad; he can't be both. Our neighbor who plowed our part of the sidewalk without being asked to is GOOD. The driver who cuts us off when we're running errands is clearly and inexcusably BAD.

While we humans have a hard time reconciling offenses with good deeds, God doesn't. He still faithfully communicated to his people through the Temple AND in ways outside of that building's four walls. Solomon was indeed a wise man with visionary leadership, yet he did not make the best decisions 100 percent of the time. Permanent dichotomies don't exist to God. In our lives, we are allowed us to see ourselves and others as good, not because we are no longer bad, but because God has reconciled all our faults through the Cross.

That is Grace. That is God's mercy. That is God's unconditional, unending, uncontainable love.

~ *Brittany Kooi*

2 CHRONICLES 1:1
1 KINGS 2:13-3:4
2 CHRONICLES 1:2-6
1 KINGS 3:5-15
2 CHRONICLES 1:7-13

May 21st Readings

1 KINGS 3:16-28
1 KINGS 5:1-18
2 CHRONICLES 2:1-18
1 KINGS 6:1-13
2 CHRONICLES 3:1-14
1 KINGS 6:14-38

May 22nd Readings

1 KINGS 7:1-51
2 CHRONICLES 3:15-4:22

May 23rd Readings

1 KINGS 8:1-11
2 CHRONICLES 5:1-14
1 KINGS 8:12-21
2 CHRONICLES 6:1-11
1 KINGS 8:22-53
2 CHRONICLES 6:12-42

May 24th Readings

1 KINGS 8:54-66
2 CHRONICLES 7:1-10
1 KINGS 9:1-9
2 CHRONICLES 7:11-22
1 KINGS 9:10-14

May 25th Readings

2 CHRONICLES 8:1-18
1 KINGS 9:15-10:13
2 CHRONICLES 9:1-12
1 KINGS 10:14-29
2 CHRONICLES 9:13-28
2 CHRONICLES 1:14-17

May 26th Readings

1 KINGS 4:1-34
PSALM 72
PSALM 127

