

1 Kings 3:4-15

Today my colts will be playing for a spot in the NFL playoffs along with many other teams. Which means men, and some women, around the country will join me in yelling at professional athletes through their TV screens. I do it, lots of us do it, and it is terribly pointless, not to mention, kind of embarrassing. And as much as we know they should have caught that ball, or made that block, or thrown that pass better, the real stupidity of yelling at professional athletes through a screen is the simple truth that *we couldn't do it either*. And that is the plight of the armchair quarterbacks around the world. We very well might know what they are supposed to do, but from the comfort of our couch, no one criticizes our play even though we wouldn't come close to ever being as good as those athletes on the field. We might know what they should do, but we certainly can't do it ourselves.

The armchair quarterback's plight, is the plight, in a more sad and serious way, of King Solomon. King Solomon in our Old Testament lesson is given wisdom from God. Such wisdom the world had never seen and, except for the God-man in our Gospel lesson, would ever see again. King Solomon was so wise people came from around the world to hear him speak, he wrote several books of the Bible full of his wisdom. He wrote Proverbs. He wrote beautiful and haunting reflections on life

and death in Ecclesiastes. Solomon was wise, but, even though he knew what to do, he couldn't carry it out.

Solomon knew the law of God, what was right and wrong. But he couldn't keep it. He knew the promises of God, but was led astray by his many wives, something he knew God warned against, and he followed after their gods. He was wise. Like an armchair quarterback he knew what needed to be done, but he couldn't carry it out. And it cost him dearly. So sadly we read in chapter 11:9: "[Solomon's] heart had turned away from the Lord God."

Now you may or may not yell at football players on your TV, but we are all armchair quarterbacks. Most of us understand, if we are honest, that we all know what needs to be done and we don't do it. This is so apparent in these days of resolutions: we all know we should eat better, drink less, quit smoking, or whatever. We all know it! How much of us do it? But more seriously even: we know we are too mean, too harsh, too rude, too lustful, too biased, too hardheaded. We all know we spread the rumors and sneak behind peoples backs. How many times have you, while doing something wrong, knew it was wrong, but kept doing it anyways? We can't even count the times. We are just like Solomon, we know what needs to be done, yet we still don't do it. And if it was up to us to get saved or

even stay saved – we would be lost because we cannot do it. This is no more apparent than with Solomon. He had everything going for him! He had wealth, peace, wisdom, money – he had the best start to a kingdom ever, but he fails. And this goes to show if any part of salvation or goodness is up to us, trust me, we will find a way to screw it up.

So Solomon is a warning for us. He is a warning to show us how dangerous it is to wander down paths that lead away from Jesus. And I know the excuses, I've said them myself. "I can do the God thing later, things are fine now." "I'll just take a few of God's teachings and leave the rest that aren't socially acceptable, or are a little too personal." "I can do this now – God will forgive me." But Solomon did all of those. He sacrificed on the wrong places; he bent a few of the rules. "God wouldn't worry about those details" we lie to ourselves. Meanwhile, he was rich, famous, popular, attractive, and smart. He could do the God thing later, things were working fine for him. But it was all those things that led him down paths away from God. And in doing so all his wealth and wisdom became his absolute foolishness. Because one day he wakes up and he had turned from the Lord. And the wisest of men became a fool for the fool says in his heart there is no God.

Let this be a warning to us. Lapses into unbelief are generally slow. The faith given slowly dies like a wilting plant because it got no nourishment from the Word of God. There's nothing wrong with skipping a devotion here and there, shoot, there's nothing wrong with skipping a church service here and there, you heard it here folks! But as the author of Hebrews warns us, "don't be in the habit of not meeting together." Because God made a Church for a reason. It is not some man made institution or club that is meant to keep you down. No, Jesus said, "I will build MY Church." Because God will work through his Church to save us and keep us from straying. This is the answer to the plight of the armchair quarterback – we can't make the passes, we can't follow the game plan, we can't take the hits. But God can, so he laces them up and he goes and does it for us. He did it two thousand years ago at Christmas as he came to save a dying and wandering world. He does it now as he calls us through his Word, strengthens us through that same word, and reassures us in his sacraments. God does the work to save people like us who are unable to do what needs to be done.

So as Solomon is our warning to be mindful of straying, Jesus is our hope and assurance that he does the work, and he chases after us when we do wander. At Christmas we see it clearly. In a world that was running away from God, He came down to get us and save us from ourselves. Christ is the wisdom of God in the

flesh. He is the fullness of God in human form. The glimpses are shown in our Gospel lesson, when even as a child with no training he astounds the teachers of the scriptures with his insight. Jesus is the greater Solomon, not only because he is wiser than Solomon, but because Jesus can do what Solomon and we cannot, he knows all things, *and can actually carry it all out*. And he did.

He lived the perfect life we could not, never straying or wandering from His Father in heaven. Even when that path took him to a cross. And in the infinite wisdom and mercy of God, in the absolute, unfathomable mystery of God's love, the Son, willingly, died for the ones who turned their backs on him, for those who wander from him everyday, you and me. And in his death, he won that victory.

Forgiveness for all the times we wander and doubt and sin. It's foolishness really, that in one man's death the world would be saved, but that is the plan and mercy of God, and the absolute strength of Jesus who conquered all things. The foolishness of the Cross is the wisdom of God. And through faith he has made us wise, wiser than Solomon, wise unto salvation.

The question we want to ask then, is, ok what do we do now? But see where that leads us again? To our actions, which, as we already have seen, are incomplete, fickle, sinful. So what do we do now? *Remain in Him*. Remain in him and you just

might find your actions look a little different. How do we remain in Him? By his grace and by continuing to hear his word of promise, His strong hands that keep us near him, receive His gifts for you which are not incomplete or fickle. And guard yourself against our dark hearts and minds that, like Solomon, seek to leap from the Saviors strong hands. Hear those words of the Good Shepherd when we wander, from a Pastor, a friend, a Church member, and hear his call – not to guilt trip us, to bring us to his pastures where we are fed and nourished by his hand.

My colts may or may not be in the playoffs this year, but hey, it could be worse, I could be a Vikings fan, right? But regardless of whether or not our teams can pull it off this season, we can all be grateful, because we know the One who has done what we cannot, Jesus has conquered all things and brought us through His Work and grace, to his side, and there, at his side, let us rejoice in the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life he offers. They are far better and far lasting than anything a football star, or even King Solomon, could purchase. In Jesus' Name. Amen.