

Honouring Age Service 16/8/15 Ask what I should give you.

1 Kings 3:3-14 Psalm 71:1-9,14-18 , John 6:51

“Give your servant then therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil...” 1 Kings 3:9

### **Discernment:**

Here we are a gathering of Seniors, hosted by the rest of the congregation at St Johns. Put on a fuss because by God’s grace we are still here – able to worship, and enjoy fellowship in this place with the company we love.

Some of you were here at the beginning. Some before the beginning, when Anglican and Presbyterian congregations met separately – St Brides and Whitcombe Road, Trinity Methodist.

Some of you were involved in the planning of this building and the charter for cooperation. In November 1975 you sat and heard the young Grahame who was being considered for the call to be the first minister.

Thank you for calling me then, and inviting me back today. Bucklands Beach, St Johns, is very dear to me and the rest of my family.

Let’s spend a few moments looking at another beginning. That of Solomon taking over the Kingdom from the greatest of all OT kings, his father, David.

**“Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father, David.”** His love for the Lord finds him in worship. He hears God’s voice,

**“Ask what I should give you.”**

He’s got a wife. He’s got a kingdom. What more?

Surely it is by the grace of God that he answers-

**“Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil.” ! Kings 3:9**

As seniors isn’t that a great prayer for us– that we might be able to present - and be - people who have an understanding mind. Many of us freed up from the rush and bustle of earlier years, getting ahead, meeting deadlines – Now able to step back a little, see a bigger picture.

I say to you – God has a special ministry for us to exercise – in the church, but also very much out there in his world.

We’ve got more time for reflection and quiet – the nurturing place for “the understanding mind.”

Hopefully we have come to recognise and deal with our prejudices, be more able to promote love and unity – in family, and church.

“An understanding mind”? - That has to do with looking for the truth.

Coming closer to Jesus, who is - “The Way, the Truth and the Life”

**St Johns has always been a very brave experiment, a pioneer church. A bold experiment in ecumenism.** I take off my hat to you all.

You responded to Jesus prayer in John 17 – *“That they may be one as we are one, Father, that they may be one that the world may believe that you have sent me”*

This has required a great deal of members – and has given a great deal.

You have had to be able to explore new ways of thinking and acting. At times it must have seemed almost too much. It’s never been an easy ride.

We all have special ways of doing things (prejudices) – mostly unacknowledged. None of us are good at confronting them.

**eg In the 1970s a member here told me of the great admiration she had for her former minister back in Ireland. “You would have heard of him” she said - “Ian Paisley!”**

By God’s grace I kept silent. I didn’t voice my prejudice. At that time I knew him, to quote a journalist, as “the booming bigot of Northern Ireland”.

But towards the end of his life he changed – went into government with former Sinn Féin leader, Martin McGuinness as deputy.

Somebody wrote – “In the end his faith was not just a creedal statement, - the love of his Lord came through.”

I was glad I’d kept silent.

**Hear this from the book, “Cry of Wonder” by a Jesuit priest. –Gerard Hughes**

*“Learning to recognise our own deeply ingrained prejudices and to free ourselves from them is a lengthy and usually painful process, but it is a process that sets us free, liberates us ... helps understand the plight of those who are outside our range.” (Page 39a)*

**An understanding mind:** The Home Group I belong to decided that we would try to exercise an understanding mind after church when talking to people.

We would keep off practical details – flowers, meetings, all the paraphernalia – and listen, care, really love. ( “I am sick of hearing about the weather!”)

**It's taken me a while to realise that problems aren't always of someone else's making.**

There's a need to begin with me – "Give your servant an understanding mind"  
eg "Maureen, where is that discount card that came in the mail?" It wasn't her that misplaced it. I, Grahame, had put it in the car glove-box!

**An understanding mind will not just be dropped on us – though God will certainly hear our prayer for this grace.**

It comes through facing up to difficulties ourselves.

The wounded one can become the healer for others.

Louise Nicholas comes to mind.

**eg** I remember coming to the door of the church house (just down the drive) a night or so after our son Lin had died. There on the porch was a woman I'd never met. She felt that because we had suffered a bereavement we would understand her recent loss. A Roman Catholic, she didn't go to her priest, she came to us. Lord this is too much! I haven't the energy.

How I needed, right then, to pray for an understanding heart to be able to invite her in. We managed.

I pray that the ageing we all experience will help give us "an understanding mind."

- to listen, bring peace, to set someone's feet in the direction that leads to life.

Sometimes we wonder if we really do have any wisdom to share. We are afraid of being bores. "Just old grannie again!"

Let's recognise that as people who've been around, seen a lot, there are moments when we should not be silent, but offer wisdom –discernment.

**So as in all of the Christian life an understanding mind is a combination = It's God's gift AND something we're working on.**

If this is who we are it will be recognised. We will have ample opportunity to exercise the gift.

**We all remember the story of Solomon using his discernment to deal with conflict. Two women.** Two new born infants. One alive, one dead. The live one's mine they both shout. Solomon didn't have DNA. Didn't need it. He had been given an understanding mind.

When he offered half of the living child to each mother – the birth-mother cried - "Give it to her." Discernment.

There's always conflict where there's human beings.

We can help people address it, not pretend. Be calm.

God has given us time. Time when we can contemplate. Reflect on what has been. Listen, pray, worship. Look at things squarely. Face our own inner fears, doubts.

This is a time of learning when we can grow in the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, self-control. -

When we can grow into the life of the Kingdom of God. Then, when we meet the King face to face heaven won't be so much a surprise. We will already have been living that way.

I have been inspired, and challenged, by the book – **“Father Joe – the man who saved my soul.”** It's by Tony Hendra, satirist and colleague of John Cleese and other Monty Python people.

Hendra like so many of his associates found himself challenged by drink and drugs, marriage break up. As a fourteen-year- following an unfortunate incident, he'd been taken to Father Joe, a gentle, stammering, ungainly Benedictine monk.

Father Joe didn't come down heavily with words like “wrong” or “guilt”. He had his standards, but what he conveyed was grace, the love of God, the forgives of sins.

Tucked away in a monastery on the Isle of Wight anyone might have wondered what practical use he could be in the world to anyone.

Right up to his last few days on earth this priest gave counsel and support to this bruised man.

Only by chance did Hendra later found out that “his” Father Joe had been counsellor and confessor to many, many others, Lady Dianna among them. What grace.

Father Joe had an understanding mind.

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit” – an essential component of life in the Kingdom of God. That's what this is about.**

“Understanding” is more than receiving, processing, information. It is about imaginative comprehension.

Part of our calling in these later years is surely to try and put ourselves in the place others are in – other generations, other ethnicities, other nations. -

To try and get on the inside of their viewpoints and feelings.

To pray for them. God's other children.

**How privileged we are that God has thought fit to keep us in this world to go on serving him and enjoying his presence. To wake up each morning with the cry-**

**“This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”**

May we keep from mental retirement and find new ways to serve the Lord in his world.

We identify with the Psalm writer’s prayer –

*Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent. Psalm 71:9*

We trust, that -

*In old age they still produce fruit, (they are always green and full of sap)(?).Ps92:14*

And we hold tight God’s promise given through Isaiah (46:4)

*Even to your old age I am he. Even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made and I will bear, I will carry and I will save.*