

What a Bonanza!

I happened to watch a late night episode of Bonanza during January, and became more intrigued than usual. Firstly because the whole episode was about the Church, and secondly, I was kept wondering whether young people today would be aware of the allusion that was being invoked in the episode, namely 'The wisdom of Solomon'.

The story revolves around two feuding families, who each happen to have had a member of their families fall in love, leave the town, marry and have two children. Sadly the parents are killed in an accident and the two children are sent to the town so there can be a formal hearing by the local judge to decide their custody.

The judge initially 'orders' Ben Cartwright to look after the children while a final decision is made. He is also charged with making the long-term decision for their welfare. This is because (and the townspeople seemingly do not disagree) is that Ben is a good and Godly man who will make a wise decision. It also reflects an era where the Church was more at the centre of the community.

Ben is usually in the business of peace-making within the community and church, and he decides to have a lunch after the church service to welcome the new minister to town. Even this is a little sticky as the feuding parties want to make sure they keep their food separate (would this ever happen in our churches?). The sermon is preached powerfully and aptly from the sermon the mount, and the lunch goes off well, especially because the new minister had demanded that there be no guns in church (after all this was still the slightly wild west) because it was Palm Sunday, and we should "keep things peaceful".

Ben is pretty much overawed by his responsibility and he seeks the counsel of the new minister (who is very much a Christ figure), and is prompted toward the word of God, namely the familiar story in 1 Kings 3 and he also remembers the story of God speaking to Samuel.

The final part of the legal hearing has Ben asking only one question of the families (mainly to the grandparents). What will you offer the children? One family immediately mentions their wealth and ability to provide all the wants the children would have. The other nearly falls into the trap as well by wanting to compete in the material sense. Ben wants them to sincerely say they will love their enemies, and provide a home where the love of God is real and practically shown. He clearly does not want anything in return and certainly is above corruption by bribe or reward.

Ben then proposes to divide the children, and gives the boy to the grandparents of one family and the girl to the other grandparents. On seeing the distress of the children at this division, one of the grandparents decides it is too much, and she takes 'her' child and asks them to be placed together.

The wealthier family then realises that it is the other family who are best placed to bring up the children. This action is the start of the reconciliation, as both families could now see how the 'homes' the children could have entered would have been based on hate, rather than love. They would have provided a stumbling block for the children, rather than a starting block for the eternal race.

As the minister had predicted, the children would do Ben's work for them.

I could not help but be reminded of another passage in the New Testament.

1 About this time the disciples came to Jesus and asked him who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 2 Jesus called a child over and had the child stand near him. 3 Then he said: I promise you this. If you don't change and become like a child, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. 4 But if you are as humble as this child, you are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And when you welcome one of these children 6 It will be terrible for people who cause even one of my little followers to sin. Those people would be better off thrown into the deepest part of the ocean with a heavy stone tied around their necks! 7 The world is in for trouble because of the way it causes people to sin. There will always be something to cause people to sin, but anyone who does this will be in for trouble. (Matthew 18: 1-7. Contemporary English Version)

Where are the Christians today in your community who are called upon by other community members to offer advice and counsel, who lead the community away from sin?

Would you be amazed if someone rang up and asked, "I know you are a member of the local church and 'a good Christian', and I would like your Godly wisdom on this matter of vital importance?" After getting over the initial shock, I would probably trip over the cat in my haste to rush out and meet this 'stranger'.

Where is the place for the man or woman of God who can make a distinct contribution in their local community today? I tend to think that one may have more opportunity in a smaller town than in the somewhat disparate suburban environments of the larger cities, but nevertheless, what could you do to help those you know have that wisdom from God that our communities are crying out for?

Take heart, pray, and ask for opportunities. Look for a way to serve your community, and look to encourage those Christians, who you know, are gifted community leaders. Above all, if you are asked, let people know that God is the provider of wisdom, and your desire to serve comes from the call to follow Jesus and make him known.

Peter Bentley

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