

Than Hitt
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Good morning. Our reading today is from **Wisdom of Solomon** chapter 12 verse 18-19.

*Although you are sovereign in strength,
you judge with mildness
and with great forbearance you govern us;
for you have power to act whenever you choose.*

*Through such works you have taught your people
that the righteous must be kind,
and you have filled your children with good hope,
because you give repentance for sins.*

Here ends the reading. May God grant us understanding.

Power! That is what this reading is about, and that motivates my reflections today as a dad, a Christian, and a citizen.

But first some context is needed, particularly because the “Wisdom of Solomon” is not a book you’ll find in the bible here in the pews. Rather, this book is part of what is known as the “**apocrypha**” - a set of ancient Jewish texts valued for their historical and spiritual insights but not included in the Protestant bible.

And in fact this history speaks to power as well - the power to include or exclude holy texts from the bible. We should remember that people made these decisions - people wielding power.

This passage was written in the voice of King Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, who was the king of Israel around 930 BCE. However, most scholars date the book to around 30-40 BCE and believe the author was a Jewish scholar living in Alexandria Egypt.

This book wrestles with a fundamental question: why would a just God tolerate evil?

And that makes sense when you consider that during 30-40 BCE, Israel was undergoing one of the most turbulent and politically charged eras in Jewish history. At that time, Jerusalem was under Roman control and the Roman-appointed Herod the Great was rising to power. So we can understand the author's focus on power and justice in this text.

So how do we understand this reading? Let's start at home: fatherhood. There are several key words that fathers will hear, starting with "sovereign" and "strength".

After all, we easily cast fathers as protector, provider, and authority figure. And some of those appellations are well deserved of course. Fathers **should** be these things, but **how** to be these things is the question. And of course fathers are not alone in the role of protector as anyone who comes near a momma bear with her cubs knows full well.

Let's talk about Hazel, my daughter. Yes, it seems like just yesterday she was an infant in Mary Anne's arms here in the sanctuary. She's 16 now, and my role as "protector" is changing by the hour.

Here's an example of how it began: when Mary Anne was pregnant and we lived on Washington Street, I spent days reinforcing the rafters and joists of our historic house to make it safe for our baby. In retrospect - the house was fine! It was **me** that needed stabilization! But this was the expectation for fatherhood (so I thought), and I had the power and obligation to make things right. Or so I thought.

16 years later...she's driving now. She has a job. The college search has begun.

And so my role is changing. I tell her “drive safe” as I throw her the car keys. And I will tell you it is damn terrifying. And beautiful.

I still strive to protect her of course, but now it’s different. Because I see that evil in the world cannot be held at bay with reinforced joists and rafters. Rather, the evil she faces now comes through unrelenting social media algorithms, the drunk driver coming at her in the other lane, as well as the systems of power fomenting inequity, crime, and violence.

And it is somewhat hard for me to accept that these problems cannot be fixed by **dad power**. At least not by dad power alone. Rather, it takes community, and that means it takes political power.

Last week I attended a town hall event hosted by my representative to the WV House of Delegates. He described another understanding of power entirely.

He told me that politics was the power of control and domination. And that tracks his record as a machine gun advocate and former lobbyist for the gun industry. But he’s also a Christian, so I asked him about this.

I asked him: when scripture tells us in Isaiah and Micah that the people should beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, how does that align with your policies that promote gun violence?

He told me, and I quote, “well, anyone can cherry pick anything from the bible” and apparently that was all he felt that he needed to say on the matter.

Look, I’m no theologian, but I couldn’t let that one go. I responded: Jesus’ power was not in weaponry but in love - not in military force but in soul force. And with that he looked at me and then pivoted to talking points about “liberty” and “freedom”.

Here’s what this means to me: to protect Hazel, to protect all children, to protect all God’s people we have to let go of our individualistic “I can fix this” mentality. We have to do the work of building community and empowering community in this county, in this state, and in this nation.

We know that Christian evangelical power has shaped the composition of the Supreme Court and has bolstered the current occupant of the White House. ICE raids and murders should be repellant to followers of Christ, an immigrant in his

time. And these attacks should be repellant also to our personal histories, as nearly all of our families immigrated to this place.

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon reminds us that the *righteous must be kind*. And when harnessed in community, that **kindness is power**: not power to dominate but power to protect our kids, power to build safe communities, power to overturn corrupt political systems that thrive in our nation today.

I admit there's a bit of dad in that sentiment. I want to make it right. But the honest thing is that **I can't**. Indeed no one can, alone. But together, and in kindness - yes we can. Yes we can. Amen.