

## Column

The first book I read about Jimmy Carter was a short autobiography entitled “Why Not the Best?” The title comes from a question Admiral Hyman G. Rickover asked the future President in an interview following his graduation from the Naval Academy.

“Did you do your best,” was the question. At first, Mr. Carter said, “Yes.” But, then quickly amended his answer to “not always.” After which the Admiral said, “Why not?”

That question – Why not the best? – stuck in his mind continued to inform his decisions throughout his long career in public service. It confronts us as well.

One Old Testament character points us in the right direction as we ask it in reference to ourselves. The character I am thinking of is King Solomon.

As his story is told in 1 Kings 3, early in his reign, Solomon has a dream. In this dream, God hands him, as it were, a blank check: Ask for whatever you want. I wonder what thoughts went through his mind as he considered God’s offer?

Would it be for a new presidential Porsche, an impressive investment portfolio at the Jerusalem branch of Morgan Stanley, a country villa, success over all other rivals, a big name, a long life?

In the end, Solomon asked for none of these things, but rather an understanding heart so he could rule his people well and wisely. This thing pleased the Almighty, who promised to give him not only what he requested – wisdom -- but also what he had not requested -- earthly riches and fame.

If someone were writing up the story of the early portion of Solomon’s life, “Why Not the Best” would surely fit. Sadly, the high plane on which his reign began would not continue until its end, but that is a story for another day.

Going back to God’s offer to Solomon, what if God made you the same offer? What would you say?

I want to suggest He has. In John 15:7, Jesus, the Son of God, tells the disciples (and by extension us): “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

And so, we too have been handed a blank check. What will put in the blank? Will it be for divine wisdom to know God and His will for our life, to know how to confront challenges with courage and grace, and to know those things to tackle that will make a difference in our world? Or will it be for a lesser thing? Why not the best?

*ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick [living] and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen. (Collect for Advent, The Book of Common Prayer)*

*The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.*