“Let the Baby Live”

Each Easter, the church is called once again to live into resurrection life—not only as a doctrine we proclaim but as a way of practicing it together. In that context, 1 Kings 3:16–28 serves as a probing reminder for the church whenever the desire to win threatens the life of the ministry entrusted to us.

In an era when congregations and conference organizations can quickly split apart into "sides,” this passage encourages the United Church of Christ—local churches, conference boards, and staff alike—to ask a different question: not “Who is right?” but “What allows the ministry to thrive?”

Wisdom that protects life

The narrative is familiar. Two women, both marginalized and lacking advocates, stand before King Solomon, each claiming to be the mother of a single living child. There are no witnesses, no external proof, and no straightforward way to settle the dispute.

Solomon’s shocking command—“Bring me a sword… Cut the living child in two”—is not meant as a serious policy suggestion but as a test that reveals what isn’t obvious on the surface: each woman’s true connection to the child’s life. One woman agrees to the child’s death so she won’t lose, while the other gives up her claim so the child can live. Israel recognizes God's wisdom in Solomon because his judgment protects life rather than sacrificing it to settle the dispute.

Exegetically, the story is more than just a display of cleverness. It is a royal court tale showing what God-given wisdom looks like amid human conflict. The wise ruler does not select a neat, symmetrical outcome that treats both sides “equally” by destroying what is at stake. Wisdom protects the vulnerable and refuses resolution at the expense of life.

The living child

In the life of the church, the “living child” can represent the shared ministry God has entrusted to a congregation, an association, a conference, and the larger United Church of Christ. That ministry does not belong to a pastor, a faction, a board, a conference staff, or any single vision group. It is a trust—received, not owned, for the purpose of God’s mission in the world.

When conflict arises, the temptation is to see ministry as a possession. We talk about “my church,” “my program,” “my staff,” or “my conference,” and may hardly notice when our focus shifts from nurturing ministry to controlling it. In the biblical story, one mother would rather see her child die than see him in another’s arms. This serves as a spiritual warning to the church whenever being right, winning, or protecting our side takes precedence over the growth of the ministry.

In contrast, the other mother adopts a cruciform stance. She prefers to yield her public claim rather than see the child harmed. Her love grants her status, allowing life to be preserved. Reading in light of Easter, that posture reflects Christ's self-giving way and reminds the church that resurrection life is always connected to costly love.

Resurrection and division

Because Easter calls the church to new life, division must be taken seriously. Not every disagreement can be avoided, nor does every conflict mean a loss of faith. However, when divisions deepen into factions, when personalities overshadow the mission, or when winning becomes more important than witnessing, the church begins to turn against its own members.

That danger appears in several forms. A congregation can split into "teams" around a pastor, staff member, or preferred vision for ministry. A conference board and staff can become tense over priorities, identity, staffing, or public witness until shared ministry is seen as an extension of one group's agenda rather than a covenantal trust. In either case, ministry turns into a trophy to be won or a possession to be defended instead of a life to be protected.

Easter provides a new perspective. Resurrection faith asks not how to preserve pride, but how to make room for life. It calls leaders and congregations alike to practices of humility, repair, and shared discernment so that what God has entrusted to the church may thrive and grow.

Unity in Christ

This vision aligns closely with UCC theology and governance. Christ is the head of the church, and each level of the church—local congregation, association, conference, and national body—exists in a covenantal relationship centered on Christ's mission. Therefore, unity does not rely on compatible personalities, shared politics, or social similarities. Instead, it is based on belonging to Christ and being mutually accountable to the gospel.

That means the church does not have to pretend that tension is unreal. It does mean that personal dislike, factional loyalty, and institutional self-protection must not be allowed to harm the ministry we share. The covenant that binds the church is deeper than preference, stronger than irritation, and more enduring than any single conflict.

Commitments for church life

If this text is heard with Easter ears, it calls the church to several commitments.

- Understand that ministry is not a possession; it is a trust from God, and no person or group owns it.
- Avoid destructive victories; a win that harms the body is not a true triumph.
- Protect the vulnerable by considering how decisions affect those with the least power—in particular, youth, newcomers, small congregations, bi-vocational pastors, and marginalized communities.
- Base unity on Christ rather than personal preference; the church belongs to each other because it first belongs to Christ.

For congregations, the key question before any major decision is this: Does it enable the ministry to thrive and grow? Does this choice enhance worship, witness, formation, justice, and pastoral care, or does it mainly serve to protect the preferences of one group?

For conference boards and staff, the same question applies broadly. How leaders organize their work, handle disagreement, and speak about each other either protect or threaten the life of the shared ministry. In tense seasons, wisdom shows in leaders—lay and ordained—who are willing to surrender status, control, or preferred strategies so that the church's witness stays alive.

In the end, Solomon is remembered not because he found a clever compromise, but because he refused any solution that would kill the child to end the argument. The church will demonstrate Easter wisdom similarly: not by proving who is right, but by consistently choosing the path that allows the ministry to thrive.

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