Sermons at Christ Church

Be God's Light That Shines In The darkness.

Pentecost XII
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Ask what I should give you. Says the Lord God. There was no limitation to this request. Simply ask. Solomon weighs this request against the backdrop of the depth of relationship between his father David and God, and then makes this somewhat unconventional request-that one gift that makes all the difference in our lives. Solomon himself loved the Lord and he manifested this love by his offerings, sacrifices and by the keeping of the statutes of the Lord.

Upon hearing the request in his dream, Solomon did ask for that one thing. You called me to lead your people in the place of my father. I am but a child who doesn't know his left from the right. But to govern your people, I ask for a discerning heart, I ask for wisdom. I ask for the tools with which to lead. Equip me with the one gift that makes all the difference in our lives.

Hearing Solomon's words reminds me of Jesus' words in the Beatitudes. Read Matthew 6, where among other teachings, Jesus admonishes us not to be anxious about anything but to seek first the kingdom of God and all other things shall be added unto it. The kingdom that Jesus talks about is saturated with wisdom, the kind of wisdom that comes from the word of God and leads us to live fulfilling lives.

Solomon didn't ask for anything material: cars, horses, houses, money, wealth, gold or silver. Solomon didn't ask for good relationship with people. Solomon didn't ask for anything that would benefit only him. Solomon didn't ask for good health. He didn't ask for anything that had the potential of becoming an impediment in his relationship with God. He didn't ask for anything that could lead him to lose focus on the responsibility that God has given him. He asked for that one thing that makes all the difference in our lives and which no one could take from him. He asked for wisdom. For without wisdom, how can you manage anything? How can you live?

Wisdom is that one thing Paul refers to when he cautions us to be careful how we live, not as unwise people, but as wise people-people who are full of wisdom. Remember, he doesn't ask us to live perfect lives, no! For no one can be perfect and perfection in itself is an illusion.

Rather, he implores us to live as wise people, people who are full of the spirit because they feast on the bread that doesn't perish. We live as wise people because the bread which sustains us is the word of God itself. We live as people who are full of the spirit because we abide in Christ and Christ in us.

I had a teacher in my boarding school who was an alumna of the school. He always told a story about his time as a student at the school. Boarding schools in Ghana was often rough and food was the one commodity that most people lacked at school. The parents lived over one fifty miles from the school, and didn't have money. And so whenever this gentleman is about to set-off for school, the father will invite him to his bedroom for a father-son conversation. He will say this to him 'Son, you know I have no money or riches. And even if I had money or riches and gave them to you, someone who is stronger and smarter than you could take the money and riches from you. For that reason, I want to give you something that no one can take away from you, which is your education. Whatever you study will be in your head and no one can take what is in your head from you. And so study hard when you go to school.'

This story has stuck with me since my teenage years because I found great wisdom in it. The wisdom that I find in God's word cannot be taken away from me, nor can it be taken away from you. More to the point, if I abide in Christ and Christ in me, if I eat his body and drink his blood, no one can take me away from Christ nor can anyone take Christ away from me. I abide in him as much as he abides in me.

To abide means to dwell, to live in. Abiding in Jesus means dwelling in Jesus-making a home in him and opening ourselves up to have him make his home in us. This mutually beneficial act of indwelling is made possible by the eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood of Christ. It is a gift that no one can take away from you.

In the Eucharist, Jesus commands us to eat his body and to drink his blood. The blood that was poured on the hills of Calvary gives life to the world and offers eternal life to all who drink of it. Through the Eucharist, God becomes the new food that nourishes us in a way no other food can, and by that, God invites us to a new and deeper level of intimacy with Him. The Eucharist is an open invitation-and the wisdom in the Eucharist is our sacrifice of thanksgiving for the gift of salvation.

A few days ago I received an email from a parishioner-George Toth, about his new understanding of the fear of the Lord. The psalmist reminds us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I wrote to George and Ellen, who was cc'ed on the email that if there's to be any disappointment in our relationship with God, we can always go back and make things right with God. That opportunity takes away any fear of retribution that I may have. I added that I fall more into the 'graceful fear' category. What I meant by that is that God doesn't expect perfection from us, but it is only the wise who understands, out of graceful fear, that he or she always has the opportunity to make it right with God. And if I can make it right with God, then I can make it right with you. And that is the one gift that no one can take away from you and that one gift which makes all the difference in our lives.

How do you live? If you were Solomon, what would you have asked from the Lord? Would have asked for wisdom or a cure for COVID? Would you ask for wisdom or an end to poverty? War? Hunger? Homelessness? Greed? How do you want to live? The way you want to live determines your prayer requests.

I think there's something incredibly powerful about being wise or living as a wise person. The psalmist reminds us 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.' The one gift that no one can take away from you.

In the book of Proverbs, we read God as being personified as Wisdom who built a house, prepared a feast and invited all; even the foolish, to come and taste of His banquet-to eat of the meat and drink of the wine, that they may gain insight into the ways of life. Hear this from Proverbs:
You that are simple, turn in here! To those without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight." This is the path that makes all the difference in our lives.

This invitation by Wisdom to come eat and drink, and the invitation by Jesus to eat and drink of his body and blood is not a one-time act, it is meant to be an ongoing process. You just don't get wisdom overnight, you develop wisdom overtime-by the daily feasting on the new food and drink which is God Himself.

It is in the act of feasting on God that we take into our very own selves the nature of Christ, it is in feeding on what Wisdom has provided that we are able to develop an intimate relationship with God, a relationship where we find a spiritual path that yields to eternal life. And no one can take you away from that path.

For the sake of this intimate relationship we are to live as people who are wise enough to distinguish between what is just and unjust, fair and unfair, right and wrong, good and evil. That was Solomon's desire, and may it be our desire for that is the one gift that makes all the difference in our lives. Amen.