

Sermons at Christ Church

Building Relationships through Love.

Easter IV

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“Ask what I should give you.” In a dream, God appeared to young Solomon and invites him to ask what he wants. That was a bold invitation because if you and I were to have been invited to ask what we want, chances are that we will list the many things that we want.

I remember many years ago in the winter of 2000, when I had just arrived in the US. My aunt who lived in Alexandria, Virginia at the time, visited me in Greenbelt and took me to the Pentagon City Mall in Alexandria, Virginia. That was my first visit to any mall, and I couldn't believe that there was this much stuff in one place.

When we walked into Macy's, my aunt asked me to pick whatever I wanted. I remember saying to myself, what in God's name can I pick? I was so overwhelmed with the amount of stuff in that store that I only picked three items-a sweater, long johns and a shirt. I still have the long johns.

I have thought long and hard over what Solomon may have felt about God's invitation. He probably thought about the vastness of God's provision.

He thought about the steadfast love of God to his father David. He thought about the privilege of leading the people that God had chosen. What on earth could he ask for? What do I need?

And then he said, *“I am only a child... Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”*

In other words, give me what I need to lead your people. Give me what I need to serve your people. Give me what I need to be able to make the choices that would inure to the benefit of your people. Give me what I need to walk on the path of your word. Give me what I need to sustain my relationship with you.

Solomon’s answer reminds me of Jesus’ words “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Our first and only need is the wisdom that comes from the words of the kingdom.

But I think I know why Solomon asked for wisdom. Someone once said that “Doubt is the soul of wisdom” To be wise is to understand that you cannot be always right and that is why we often doubt ourselves over some of the choices we make.

Bertrand Russell, a French philosopher is reported to have once said that *“Fools are always so sure of themselves, while those who are intelligent are full of doubt.”* His point was that the more you know about something, the more you know about how you can be wrong.

To be wise then is to know that you can be wrong, and Solomon’s choice for wisdom was to demonstrate that sense of humility which accepts that we can be wrong and he can be wrong. Solomon, by his choice, rejected what the fool believes, that he/she is always right.

If you read closely Solomon's response, you will find out that it wasn't about asking for what he wanted for myself alone. It was about providing him with what he needed to be a mustard seed which grows to become a tree and provides, it was about making him the yeast in the flour so he could be big enough to be broken and fed to as many people as possible.

Do not give me what I want but give me what I need to serve you my God and your people. The question is, what do we need? And do we even know what we need?

I can tell you that if God were to ask you and I the same question he asked Solomon, our list would be as long as the stretch of interstate 95. And it wouldn't surprise me if our list will be about our wants-those wants that offer temporal satisfaction and even pull us away from the pursuit of the kingdom.

Remember that the promise of the kingdom isn't so much about what we want, it is about what we need-not necessarily for ourselves alone but for others. The promise of the kingdom is about losing everything for the sake of that one thing which provides you with unquestioned satisfaction and value-wisdom. Wisdom that flows from the word of God.

I learned from St. Aquinas that there are three things that are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe; to know what he ought to desire; and to know what he ought to do. The fact is, what we believe, desire and ought to do as a benefit of our salvation isn't far from each other. To an extent they are even connected.

To find the synergy between what we believe, desire and ought to do is fundamentally akin to losing everything we possess for the sake of the treasure we find in possessing the kingdom of heaven. The joy in making such a find supersedes anything material and is more valuable than any asset we have ever owned.

Listen to Jesus who has been using parables to teach about the kingdom of heaven.

He uses five different ways to describe the kingdom of heaven.

One *‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.* **Two** *‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast* **Three** *‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.’* **Four** *‘The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls.’* **Five** *‘The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind.’*

Jesus doesn’t tell us in black and white what the kingdom is, he simply tells what it is like. And he does that because no number of words would be sufficient to capture the length and breadth of what the kingdom is. We only get a sense of what it is like but not what it is.

The one thing we can deduce from what Jesus said about the kingdom is that it is not beyond our reach. The wisdom in what Jesus said was that the kingdom of heaven may start small, it may be invisible, it may be hidden and it may contain both the good and the not-so-good. But do not dismiss it’s potential to transform. Our first joy is in knowing that it is a valuable treasure which isn’t beyond our reach.

The second joy is in knowing that we can search for it by ourselves, we can cultivate it by ourselves, we can nurture it by ourselves, and we can pursue it by ourselves because of the wisdom we have been given.

There is a story of a monk who once gave his students this hypothetical. If you carry a cup of coffee and someone bumps into you, and you spill some coffee, why did you spill the coffee? Each of the students said it was because someone bumped into me. The monk said no.

The reason why you spilled the coffee is because that's what you were carrying in your cup. If you were carrying water, you would have spilled water. He then said this whenever life shakes you, whatever you are carrying is going to spill out. So, if you are carrying fear, or jealousy or anger or greed, that's what is going to spill out.

If you are carrying love compassion, kindness or empathy, that's what is going to spill out. So, each and every day, you should pause and think to yourself what am I carrying in my cup today?' What is in your cup today? Is your cup filled with enough wisdom to bring about the kingdom of heaven or is it filled with more of you?

The hardest part of being a Christian is that it is so daily-we get up every morning and do it all over again. We do it all over again because you know it is life-giving. We do it all over again because of the joy that comes from knowing the impact that we have on the lives of ordinary people. We do it all over again because there is nothing of equal value to what we do. We do it all over again because we are wise enough to sell all that we have for that one thing which makes all the difference in our lives. The tension here is, our inability to lose everything makes it impossible to gain anything.

If the parables of the kingdom will make any difference, it would be because like Solomon, we have figured out what we need-wisdom.

Here is a prayer for you “Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you.”

Amen