

"Wisdom in our Time – A Path for Prayer"
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 12
30 July 2023
Trinity+St.Peter's Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California

I Kings 3:5-12
Psalm 119:129-136
Romans 8:26-39
Saint Matthew 13:31-33:44-52

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Initial Idea: Seeking wisdom in our praying – seeking the Night Vision

As I wandered about in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, I stumbled upon an amazing piece of sculpture. It was a larger than life-size depiction of the great Pharaoh, Ramses II, as a child. The clues are all there, the size, the side lock of hair hanging down the right side of his head, and, interestingly, his right forefinger stuck in his mouth. It was common to depict the ruling pharaoh's as sucking children. I was struck with this image. The great and the powerful depicted as a child.

In our first reading today, we have King Solomon dozing in a dream, in which he has an image of God, a God willing to endow him with whatever he needs to succeed as the ruler of Israel. In his prayer, Solomon says, *"O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in."* Such an admission to make – a position of total neediness and dependence. What I hope you can take home with you today from my words are some attitudes that we might affect in our praying. The first of these attitudes might be that of a childing, seeking advice and knowledge. That might be a difficult thing for us to do, caught up as most of us are, late in life. Can we become children again, seeking our way? Perhaps it is the dependence that I am recommending, this dependence upon God, and really upon others. Solomon sees himself in the company of a great number of people in Israel, a great number of people that he will be expected to lead and to advise. Now he requests to be led, and to be advised. Can we do that, asking God how we are to be in our families, or in our life situation? Can we recognize in our successes the need to be needy, and to ask for help?

Second Idea: Seeking wisdom in God's will and law.

Where might we go to see what it is that God wants us to do and to be. The Psalm for this morning is a pastiche of various verses and quotes from other sources all centered on gaining wisdom from God's law. The second verse in

our reading for this morning says it well: *"When your word goes forth it gives light, it gives understanding to the simple."* We are the simple, and as we shall see the key to all of this seeking is the ordinary nature of our lives, the simpleness of living. If we look at the scriptures as a record of ordinary people, in the midst of ordinary lives, we will gain a great deal. In college, I learned Hebrew, and what it instilled in me was that these were not people who realized they were a part of sacred history, but rather a people wrestling with everyday problems. God's word to them was simple, you are not alone, we have a covenant with one another.

We get clues now and then in the Bible about how to behave. Often times they are too simple for us. "You shall not kill." What does that mean? How does that affect my daily life, and my life with others? We need to go deeply into the commandments to see what the total wisdom is there. It will not be enough to post them in our schools on a wall if there is no will to discover what is really meant by them and how we might learn to live by them. The same goes for the Beatitudes, or other collections for "how to" in the Bible. They need constant scrutiny, and our constant and quiet resolve to discover their meaning. Like Solomon, we can take our neediness pointed out to us by these verses and make them a prayer in need. We need to want more for our ability to live with our neighbor.

Hearing wisdom in what the Spirit says to us.

This is, perhaps, my favorite reading from *"Paul, The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."* One time I went to mass in a Chinese Church, at the Prayers of the People, the place was interrupted with prayers from all kinds of people, voicing their petitions in words that I didn't understand. I had the same experience at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, where men burst into dance, song, and prayer with a shower of words that were beyond me. The words showed the power, the power of the Spirit to come into the neediness of our lives and to give voice to those needs, it was like hearing a thousand Solomons.

Sometimes I think it is best to pray silently, to stare into space and to realize what it is that we actually need to live. I had to teach myself to do this. I went on a silent retreat once. There was no visiting, there was no spoken prayer, there were no words – just me and God staring at one another, learning to know one another. I have been involved in a meditation practice for some years now, and it always amazes me how thoughts, prayers, voices, petitions, and thanksgivings come readily to mind in the silence of that room. Once in Israel, up on the top of Masada, I came upon the ruin of a Byzantine church. When I went inside to see the interior, I become immediately aware of all the prayers that had been said there. The prayers were in the walls. I wonder what prayers are in these walls.

The Final Idea: Finding wisdom in the ordinariness and challenging nature of daily life

The kingdom of God is like a large tree grown from a small seed. The kingdom of God is like the yeast in the air that makes for good sourdough. The kingdom of God is like a hidden treasure. The kingdom of God is like a huge expensive jewel. The kingdom of God is like a net that catches all kinds of fish. The kingdom of God is like? (Silence) What is the kingdom of God like to you? Perhaps if we are seeking something in the kingdom of God we will know it if we know the neediness of our own lives. Perhaps the kingdom of God is made known to us in prayer.

In the liturgy, when we get ready to say the collect for the day, I say, "The Lord be with you." And you say, "And also with you." And then I say, "Let us pray." And then I allow for silence. Why? I want that silence to be filled with your prayers before we pray the common collect – as a collection of all our prayers. The same holds true in the prayers of the people, when there is silence – time for your prayers in silence, or aloud if you are bold enough. The Kingdom of God is like a bunch of people sharing their prayer. It is a great communication device. God gets to know what you need, we get to know what you're dealing with, or what kind of thankfulness you have. The kingdom of God is like sharing. Prayer is sharing.

All of our praying comes out of the ordinary nature of our lives, seeds, yeast, treasures, found treasures, a net that gathers things in. I hope you will go home thinking about what the kingdom of God is like...for you. How your prayers might be words for you. How your prayers might address the neediness of your neighbor. Jesus final teaching in this series: *"Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."* What treasures have you found in your praying? What have you given up? What is new in your life and what is old? This is the stuff of prayer; this is the stuff of the Kingdom of God.

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