

A Wonderful Gift ~ July 27, 2008

I Kings 3:5-12; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52; Psalm 119:129-136

We have all been given wonderful gifts as we have gone through life. Some we recognize instantly as being wonderful, while others it takes a while to fully appreciate.

We live in a world in which we are told that we deserve all the best and we have little pieces of plastic that ensure that we can have whatever it is we want instantly. Some of the treasures we seek and possess turn out to be far less than we had hoped for. Things become old and we keep seeking something new to make us feel alive and happy. We know that we need to base our lives on something with greater depth but we just cannot help ourselves. Cultivating a deeper meaning for our lives, requires effort and thought and reflection and there are times we are just too shallow to want to challenge ourselves to something better.

So, it is very refreshing to come across a person like Solomon, reputed to be the wisest man in the Bible, who asks for a gift from God that is neither glittery nor glamorous. Pause for a moment and think about what it is you would ask God for if our Creator told you that you could have anything you wanted. It's a little like contemplating what you would do if a genie flashed out of a bottle and told you that you would be granted three wishes and that you should choose wisely. In most genie stories things turn out badly or in way the wisher had not foreseen.

But, Solomon, because he was born with an innate wisdom, didn't ask for anything material. Instead, he asked for the gift of discernment—the ability to be able to sort out life and all that was right and wrong in it. Through having this gift he would be able to plot his way through life and the way of his nation in accord with the will of God. God thought this was a wonderful request and he gave him discernment and all else for which he might have wished.

The gift of discernment allowed Solomon, as it allows us, the ability to discover and understand what it is in life that has the most value and meaning for us. I remember my pastor always telling us to “preserve the highest value” in all that we did in life. To do this we need to take the time and have patience with ourselves to develop the gift of discernment.

For us, as Christians, this should be a task that is fairly easy. We have two commandments we are to live by every moment. To “love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength and our neighbor as our self.” Seems simple enough, doesn't it? Well, yes, until we consider our neighbors. **Those people** who are abrasive, arrogant, who rarely lend a helping hand, who are miserly, who let their dogs run loose all the time, who have no regard for other people and their property. Who sure don't seem to love us. But, the commandment is not that they love us. It is that we love them.

It is surprising what truly loving another person can bring about. Truly loving. Not just that good romantic stuff, but deeply loving and appreciating. When we can truly love others as we love ourselves, we discover vast resources of patience and understanding within our hearts and souls. We learn how to cut another being some slack as he or she fumbles through life just as we do. We learn the delicate art of forgiving and renewing relationships. We begin to understand that other people are the same as we are

with all the same strengths and frailties. We set aside all those “those people” judgments and begin to learn to live and let live.

This is a hard lesson and it requires that we develop the gift of discernment. What is important in life? That we are always right and our opinion, our way, is the only one that counts? That other people are poor dumb bunnies that always need our brilliant corrections and directions? If we think this way we find ourselves separated from one other and from God.

So we need to ask ourselves, “Just what is our pearl of great price? What is it for which we would give up everything we have to possess?” Jesus was asking these questions through a series of kingdom of heaven parables. He was asking people to sit down and think and discern what it was that would bring the most value to their lives and that would help bring about the kingdom of God on this earth. Not something somewhere out there, but the kingdom in the here and now. How is it we can sow the tiny seed of love and have it grow into something bigger than we are or our community of faith is?

We can plan and plot and scheme, but as Nike said a few years ago, “Just do it.” Discern what it is that is needed and just do it. In a small way that will take off and become a bigger and broader way encompassing more people as it moves along.

Someone once said to me that when I leave you I will “leave no legacy.” After thinking about this, I decided that is fine with me. That is not in my mindset. I do not do my job to “leave a legacy.” How dead is that? My desire is to do what I can best do to help you find a way to become a living, productive, loving body of Christ--a living field that contains many treasures so rich and deep that it becomes something in which others want to have a part. This takes time and patience and energy and a lot of love.

It was the goal Solomon had in mind for the nation Israel, it was the hope Jesus had for those who discerned his way and who would help bring about the kingdom. That is my hope, also.

-- Amen