

## Meditation 1: "Worthy Requests of God"

### Scripture Lesson 1: I Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

<sup>10</sup>Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. <sup>11</sup>The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.

<sup>12</sup>So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

<sup>3</sup>Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. <sup>4</sup>The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

<sup>5</sup>At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." <sup>6</sup>And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. <sup>7</sup>And now, 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. <sup>8</sup>And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup>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?" <sup>10</sup>It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup>God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup>I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. <sup>13</sup>I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. <sup>14</sup>If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

I have prayed to God for many things.

As a child, I prayed that I might get certain favorite toys at Christmas, that I might get away with the things I did wrong, that I might not be called on in the school classroom, that my bedroom would magically clean itself, and that I would be permitted to drive a motor vehicle at age ten (anyone like to guess which type of motor vehicle?).

As a youth, I prayed that I might get straight A's in school, that I might draw the attention of certain girls in my class, that I might acquire certain motorcycles, that I would win the lottery and forego the tedium of pursuing a real career.

When I met my future wife Terri, I prayed that I was good enough for her.

When our family started to grow, with one child then another, then a third, our prayers began in earnest for wisdom and insight to raise them well. As they grew older, our prayers became largely ones of asking for strength and patience to keep up with their changing lives and somewhat questionable choices; and finally, as they are now in the beginnings of their new lives with partners and children, our prayers have become "God help them and be with them in ways we no longer can..... "

Presently, I find myself praying some different prayers than I have ever prayed. I pray that the media technology we are now heavily dependent upon will work. I pray that none in my family or congregation will be afflicted by Covid. I pray that the recent rise of incivility and overt prejudice in our own nation will diminish. I pray that we have the courage to do what it takes to effectively combat climate change. I pray that we will honestly face the horrors of the past by changing things for the future. And I pray that we can make new progress in seeing all people as entities of sacred worth.

From this inventory of my prayer life from childhood to present, it is obvious to me that some of my prayers are better than others. Perhaps you have the same sense about your prayers over the years - that they evolve and change as we do; that they ebb and flow based upon the particularities of time and place and experiences within the context of creation.

But there is one prayer that I do believe stands out above all the others, a sort of catch all prayer that holds the most promise for a life of fullness, peace, grace, and love. It is the prayer of King Solomon, reflected in this passage from 1 Kings. God appeared to Solomon in a dream as he began his reign over the people of Israel; God asked Solomon what he would ask for; Solomon replied with the following words: "O Lord my God, I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>9</sup>Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil." In effect, God asks Solomon what he wants; Solomon says to God "help me be who you need me to be." And the passage ends with a note that "<sup>10</sup>It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this."

HELP ME TO BE WHO YOU WANT ME TO BE. This may sound quite contrary to the wisdom of the world, for there are a lot of voices out there saying no one should determine the significance or particularities or identity or rights of another. But we are not talking about interactions between persons, who so very often get things wrong; we are talking about interactions with the divine, who knows all, who even knows us better than we know ourselves. Faith is the life perspective that recognizes our complete and utter dependence upon God to provide what we cannot; and faith is the life experience that shows us how God does provide precisely what we need.

Prayer: Lord, you offer yourself to us in an unlimited way, even as we limit ourselves to your access by shallow thinking, fear-based believing, or myopic

apathy. But you have said that our reception of what you offer begins with openness of being and purity of heart, which everyone of us is capable of - it is the honest asking of you to enter our lives which prompts the movement of grace. So we do open ourselves to you, Lord, and ask that you show us what matters; show us what is true, what is wise, what really works for life, mine and others; show us how to live, how to love, how to help, how to heal; show us how to be graceful, to be conduits for Christ, to be compassionate and authentic in our caring. Show us your mind and your heart, Lord, that we may reflect these into the world. Amen.

## Meditation 2: "Worthy Requests of Ourselves"

### Scripture Lesson 2: Ephesians 5:15-20

<sup>15</sup>Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup>giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I hate to start a sermon this way, but I feel I must - I need to let you know our church may be in very serious trouble. By our church I mean our Christian church, the global church, not just our particular fellowship; we've got a major issue, a major barrier that has arisen between ourselves and God. The barrier is quite obvious in our scripture lesson from Ephesians. For what is the counsel of Paul, to follow the will of God, to allow ourselves to be filled with the spirit of God? What is the counsel he offers as a replacement to drunkenness and debauchery and the foolishness of our world? And what precisely has this pandemic prohibited with reference to houses of worship and the conducting of services? SINGING! From the scriptural text, Paul says "be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts;" and here we have to proclaim, as we have for over a year, that singing in precisely such a manner might help to spread a disease that risks life and health - especially in this moment towards our children, who cannot yet be vaccinated. Singing, for now, is out - and I know it hurts.

I had someone mention to me recently that they knew we were inviting people to attend worship in person, but that we were asking people not to sing.....and the comment they made was that they would return to church in

person WHEN WE CAN ALL SING. Understandable, for music is a vital part of our life together in fellowship and worship. I miss it, as I'm sure most of us do.

But we know, even from Paul's words, something quite clearly - IT'S NOT REALLY ABOUT SINGING, IS IT? The absence of song is no barrier to grace, even if it is something we struggle with. And I find it interesting that Paul makes a very important yet easily missed point here - he says "sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts." It's as if he's saying regardless of whether your voice speaks out or the piano plays or the melodies flows, why we sing matters much more than what we sing, or how we sing, or even that we sing. The significance of singing, as it is with anything we do out of the calling of our faith, is to be found in our inner motivation for doing so.

It's not about singing; it's about openness to God. Openness to God expressed often in actual singing; but much more significantly openness to God in the desire to sing as a reflection of our adoration for and appreciation of God. Singing is but one example; it is our desire to sing, our desire to serve, our desire to pray, our desire to confess, our desire to help, our desire to forgive, our desire to be honest, our desire to be humble - it is our heartfelt desire for these things that demonstrates just how open we are to God - and that God can work with to carry us further.

I remember a time years back when I was overseeing a mission workteam which had made a trip to New York City to work in the Bowery Mission for homeless men. I led a team of 13 youth and adults who had planned for months for this trip, raising funds, making connections, working on arrangements. It was an excellent experience, but a hard one; one of our greater challenges was that we had one member of our team who was always lagging behind, refusing to help out, sleeping in, and overall doing a poor job with the tasks at hand. His name was Kevin; Kevin came from a fairly traumatized background; his older brother was in jail. He was the youngest member of our group, just having entered high school; and this mission trip was pretty intense for him. I remember sitting down with Kevin after awhile, trying to find out what was going on, and I remember after a few words I turned to Kevin and said to him, "Kevin, it seems like your heart isn't in this trip." He agreed. I would like to say that that conversation was a turning point for Kevin, but it wasn't. He remained pretty apathetic and disruptive for the rest of the project. But it was a turning point for me and the team, for I realized the team would not be able to count on Kevin doing his part - it was not

his fault perhaps, but it was our reality. The major work of motivating Kevin stopped, and we aimed our efforts on what the other team members could accomplish out of their motivation. And they accomplished a lot.

If the inner motivation is missing, or off track, or passed over, no matter what we sing or do or pray or think, it will not be of God, and will not lead us into the life God intends for us. It is our constant work of faith, to make sure our motivations are aligned with God; and we may be thankful to God that, if we are serious about making our motivations pure, God helps us to do so. An open heart leads the way.