

Aug 16      What you Need not What you Want

I Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

Solomon was beginning his reign. When you read the story of how he came to be king you find accounts of older brothers trying to claim the throne before David dies, his wives intriguing against each other to get their son named the heir and a whole lot more. Simply put, Solomon became king not through an orderly process but through cunning and deceit. Now he is trying to secure his kingship against all those who feel that he wrongly has been made king. One of his tactics was to go to the old high place at Gibeon. It had been seen as a holy site for a long time. It was the principle worship center for the tribe of Benjamin and so likely was used by King Saul who was from that tribe. Why he went here is a mystery because by this time the Ark of the Covenant, which was seen as the visual symbol of God's presence, was in Jerusalem. But here he went and made a huge sacrifice of 1000 animals. He was trying to impress, not God, but others with his wealth and his power. While here he has a dream. God says, "Ask whatever you wish, I'll give it to you."

Wouldn't we like this kind of offer? It is kind of like finding the magic lamp and rubbing it and having a genie appear offering you three wishes. What would you ask for if you had an opportunity like this?

Much of the time, when we ask things of God it is for wants. This was what God was expecting from Solomon because God is surprised at what Solomon requests. God was expecting him to ask for money, or power or long life. Instead of asking for wants Solomon asked for a need. Now there is nothing wrong in letting God know what you want. We want our friends and family to find healing. We want family members to find jobs. We want our country to be safe. There are lots of wants that we lift to God. This is to be expected. The problem is that often our prayers end there. This passage challenges us to take the time to reflect, to meditate, and to discern what we need. Needs are different from wants. Wants are nice if they happen, important really, but not essential. Needs are necessary either for our life, our spiritual well-being or our growth in faith and love.

What would it look like if we focused for a day or a week on prayers of need instead of want? It might surprise us and even God! In preparing for this sermon I thought about need verses want and came up with four things I feel I need. I am sure you will come up with different or additional needs for your own life.

I, like Solomon, need wisdom. I need to know my short comings while what I might want is to know more than I do. Too often we are ashamed to admit to where there are gaps in our lives, whether they are in knowledge, in skills, or in understanding. It is a humbling experience the first time you have to ask your kids for help with some new electronic device, isn't it? It can be a bit unsettling to have to admit you just don't know something, especially in an area where people assume you have a certain level of competency. It is embarrassing to come to an awareness that you have been obstinate or willful when it comes to understanding another. Yet these are all common occurrences.

When we seek for wisdom in these areas we become vulnerable, we become open to new ideas we become more self-aware and all of this leads to growth and maturity.

I also need patience to listen, especially to differing views, while I might want everyone to agree with me! It is relatively easy to surround yourself with people and news sources that will only feed the opinions you already have. To seek out, to listen with patience and openness is hard. Even more difficult are those times someone comes up to me bursting with energy to tell me about something. As I hear them begin my first thought can be, "I could care less." It is then I need patience. Often I find that when I move beyond my preconceived ideas there is much to learn, much to be gained. When we gain patience we see people's views as valuable. We celebrate their journeys. We grow in our appreciation. We might want to be isolated from some of this stuff but that is not how we grow.

I also need an accepting heart. It takes great strength to accept others where they are when their life journey might be so different from mine. Most of us would like for the world to be pretty much the way we like it. We want people to think the way we do,

worship the way we do, vote the way we do... You get the idea. Yet that is not life. We are presented with an amazing array of differences. It seems as if all we do, at times, is struggle to figure out what is the new landmine we have to be aware of. A word used yesterday is found to be upsetting today. A joke that was onetime funny is now seen as demeaning. Opinions held for a lifetime are challenged. It feels as if everyone is on a very unique journey, demanding we accept them for whom they are and no one wants to accept us. We all have felt this way, at least at moments. We wish those around us would understand us, accept us, and love us for where we are without challenging us to understand them and accept them and love them where they are!

Finally, I need the courage to forgive fully. I want to hang on to my feelings of hurt and wrong. But when I let go, and forgive I find growth, I find peace, I find contentment. Think about times in your life where you have hung on to a grudge, a sense of woundedness, or anger. Think about how that feeling poisoned everything around it. I recall how I was upset with a person. I nursed my feelings of hurt and how this person had treated me so poorly. Later, I was placed in a group where that individual was chair. In the beginning all I could do was criticize her leadership. Yet I heard others talking about how well prepared she came to the meetings, how we got so much accomplished and such. I had always enjoyed a well-run meeting and now I was criticizing her for ramrodding her agenda through. Others did not feel this way. I realized that my anger about past had poisoned the present. I let go, I forgave her and enjoyed the remained of my time on the committee.

We need strength to find the skills, the tools, and the grace to be accepting and forgiving. This means also needing the other skills we have talked about, listening and acknowledging our shortcomings. When we get what we want we are isolated and stagnant. When we get the strength we need we enter into a wonderfully challenging mix of life.

I often hear the two sides of want and need. There are people complaining about their grandchildren's addiction to electronics wanting them to write them a letter. This is so different from those who tell me they need to take a computer class so they can communicate with their grandchildren on their terms. They are embracing the

technology as a means of connecting, celebrating that they have never been more involved in their grandchildren's lives. From those who reject children or grandchildren for lifestyle choices wanting them to act like they did when they were that age, to those who are praying for grace to see how they have been blessed by the differences that have been brought into their lives by their children and grandchildren. From those who resisted change and ended up bitter because life has passed them by wanting nothing to change, to those who pray that they can see every day as an adventure with something to learn.

We all know which category we would like to be in, don't we? We may want a lot of things but we need the strength to embrace life and the people we meet on their terms with love, grace, patience and forgiveness. I am glad God doesn't answer my prayer of want, but works with me to know what I need, and the grace to accept the help God gives on God's terms instead of my own.