

Trinity 14 - 2018

This morning I want to speak to you on the subject of the best gift, and I am taking as my text 1 Kings 3:5-13.

⁵ In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

⁶ And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

⁷ And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

⁸ And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

⁹ Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

¹⁰ And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

¹¹ And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

¹² Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

¹³ And I have also given thee that which thou hast **not** asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

Imagine . . .

Three work colleagues have gone out to lunch, one of whom is the senior manager of the firm.

On their way back, they pass an antique shop. Out front there is a table with various items spread out.

They stop and have a look. One picks up an old brass lamp, takes out his handkerchief, dusts it off, and, to the surprise of all three, a genie pops out and announces she will grant each man a wish.

The youngest eagerly steps forward and say he would like to be on a beach in Hawaii holding a pinacolato, surrounded by beautiful native girls. Pop, off he goes.

The second junior staff member steps forward, and says he would like to be skiing in the Swiss Alps. Pop off he goes.

Now comes the boss's turn. "I'd like to see those two jokers back at their desks working by 2:05."

It's a rather cheezie little story that I pulled off the internet, but it does open the door to the use of our imagination.

If you received such an offer from a magical genie, for what would you ask?

A new car, a boat, a pay raise, relief from some debt, a new refrigerator, fame and fortune?

If we went around the congregation this morning asking this question no doubt, we would receive a number of answers.

Mindful that at least *some* are interested in going to breakfast [lunch], we are not going to do that.

Rather, I want us to focus on the offer made to Solomon. What makes this offer interesting is that was not initiated by some mythical genie, but by the Lord God Almighty.

Solomon, the third king of Israel, is handed a blank cheque and told to fill in the blank.

I can't say for sure, but perhaps a whole host of things flashed through his mind that day:

- A new presidential Porsche? Why not? If Joel Osteen can have one, why shouldn't I? After all, I am the king.
- A villa outside Jerusalem with a great view? Just think what the Queen of Sheba will think when she comes calling?

- A big, fat investment portfolio down at the Jerusalem branch of Morgan Stanley? Money won't buy happiness, or so they say; but let's give it a try.
- What about, turning all rival kings into braying donkeys? Sounds like something Bruce Almighty would do, but it might be fun.

All of these, with perhaps the exception of the last, are not wicked in and of themselves, but they – I want to suggest -- are less than the best.

Some of you may have read Jimmy Carter's little autobiography entitled "Why Not the Best".

The seed for this title -- I read somewhere -- was planted by Admiral Hyman G. Rickover.

In an interview soon after young Carter had graduated the Naval Academy, Admiral Rickover asked him: "**Did you do your best?**"

To which, Mr. Carter responded, "Yes sir." But, he quickly amended his answer to: "**not always.**"

The Admiral responded, "**Why not?**"

From that time on, "**Why not the best?**" became the guiding star in Mr. Carter's life -- both in his time in public service and in his time after leaving office.

I think you see where I am going with this: If a genie, or preferably God, gave you one wish, what would that wish be?

There are no doubt many good things for which you could ask, but "why not the best?"

And from Solomon, we learn what that best is. It is wisdom . . . an understanding heart to know and to do God's will.

Moreover, we are told that the request Solomon made that day pleased God.

So much so, that God gave Solomon not only that for which he asked – wisdom -- but also material riches and public honour.

The moral of the story: If you have but one wish, make it wisdom.

But, why wisdom.

Well, surely this one is not too hard to see. Wisdom is the gift that keeps on giving.

All others are fleeting and transitory. Wisdom is God showing up and taking you by the hand and leading you all the way through life and into that life that is to come.

Solomon's story is very interesting, but does God still pass out blank cheques?

I maintain He does, and I have it on good authority.

In Matthew 7:7, we find Jesus – the One who puts a human face on the invisible God – making just such an offer to you and me:

“Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened, ask and ye shall be given”.

There you have it.

That reminds me of a story . . .

When we were preparing to build the 1995 portion of this building, three or four of us went to see Tom Gilliland who at the time was president of United Community Bank.

In those days, the bank was housed in the white marble building downtown across from the Depot. As you went into the lobby, Mr. Gilliland's desk was just left of the vault.

Upon arrival, we sat around his desk and told him what we wanted to do – build a church. I shall never forget what happened next: he leaned back in his chair and said:

“Boys, there's the vault; take what you need.”

Well, God extends the same invitation to us, especially in regard to wisdom. In James 1:5, we hear these words:

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

From this verse and from the account of God’s dealings with Solomon, we learn that our God is an outrageously generous God.

He is the God who says: “Here is my vault, take what you need.”

But, I am not sure that we always view Him in this way. Just perhaps our image of God needs to change.

Instead of seeing Him as One from whom we must “squeeze out” blessings, a stingy and miserly giver, we need to see Him as One who is more ready to give than we to ask. And, we need to approach Him with this mindset as we enter the closet of prayer.

Moreover, as we have already seen, He wants us to take out of His vault the best. What is the best?

We have already been told. It is Wisdom. – the gift that keeps on giving . . . the gift that won’t rust out or wear out . . . the gift that will carry you through the whole of life.

The words of the writer of Proverbs – possibly Solomon himself – still hold:

“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and He shall direct thy paths.”

In closing, let me encourage you to make a mental list of the things you are facing in your life.

Some of the items on that list might include: a job, your health or that of a family member, what do with some bit of property, how to best serve God in His Church . . . or some other thing.

Whatever is on your list, hold it up before God this morning, and say:

Lord, I need wisdom. This is my wish and prayer. Thank you for hearing me. Amen.

