

16 August 2009
Fr. Richard Green

In one of the commentaries that I was looking at in preparation for today, the comment on this Gospel from John was 'more bread'. You'll remember the last several weeks it's been from John talking about Jesus as bread. And in the context of these other two readings and this notion from the Lord's Prayer 'Give us this day our daily bread' it would seem to me that one reading of this could possibly be that this daily bread is wisdom. That it is the wisdom of Christ.

We have in this letter from First Kings, this reading from First Kings about Solomon and how Solomon in a dream has this encounter with God and God says, "What would you like me to give you?" And Solomon says, "A discerning heart." He wants wisdom. And God comes across as being a little shocked by this and says, "Wow! Well, lad, not only will you get your wisdom but you'll also get what you didn't ask for which is wealth and a long life."

Then in this letter to the Ephesians Paul is saying: Be careful then how you live. Not as unwise people but as wise.

Being wise. And except for Solomon's case (when he got asked if he wanted it or not), for the rest of us it's going to take some effort. It's going to take some focus. It's going to take some reflection.

And the implications here are that the Kingdom is going to happen because of our wisdom. Because the Kingdom seems to be about the people in God's world having been matured into what Paul calls the fullness of Christ. That we are all Christs-in-training.

But now if you were raised in the Episcopal Church and you're at least as old as I am, there was this idea that Christian formation ends at confirmation. Once you had been to Sunday school for a few years, you had memorized the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostle's Creed, the bishop had laid hands on you—that was the end of your need for Christian formation. After that, it was just getting plugged into a sermon on Sundays and you were good to go.

Well, that doesn't seem to be in keeping with what the Scriptures are saying here - that there is an ongoing pilgrimage, you might say, of *growing in maturity*. That's an important point. It is inviting [us] into this journey but also that journey's going to require us to put something into it to get something out of it. Unless your name is Solomon. (I know nobody in this congregation by the name of Solomon.)

And so all of us—**all** of us—need to focus. What does that mean? We all need prayer and study and reflection over and over and over but in many different contexts of many different paths. Maybe it's reflection on 'Where is God in the good works I've just done?' doing whatever it is you're doing. Let's say you're working with Fish distributing

food. Where did I encounter God today in distributing food? Or yoga. Not yoga as an exercise program with some spiritual benefits but as a spiritual program with some physical benefits.

What about Bible study? Not just Bible study to gather ammo to beat up your friends with, but actual reflective Bible study where you look at things from a lot of different angles and you see where you are in the Scriptures and where the Scriptures are in you. Or a prayer life in which you don't just talk to God but you listen for the voice of God. Parenting, which gives opportunity for all sorts of growth in wisdom.

Everything we do has within it has the opportunity for the sorts of wisdom teachings that become part of our growth and maturing into the fullness of Christ. It doesn't mean accumulating yet more Anglican trivia but it might mean looking at where our tradition is growing and changing and where we hear God's call to us.

Everything is an opportunity for this growth. Seek it out. Bring your attention to it.

All of us have in our daily lives plenty of opportunities because what this process seems to do is invite us to find ways to open what can be referred to as *the eyes of the heart*. So that we see our life experience, the context of our life in God's creation, our relationships with one another, with the rest of God's creation, with God...all of this through the eyes of the heart. Through the eyes of the heart.

And what happens is our vision becomes broader and deeper and more penetrating so that the world of our surface reality is only the beginning. That we come to this growth like most things grow: Slowly and often seemingly invisibly.

There is a story that I think is attributed to Anthony de Mello and I love this story: It's about a missionary in the South Pacific in the nineteenth century and he's going from island to island on these little tramp streamers or sailing schooners or something. And he would stop and preach the Gospel and then he would move on to another place. And he gets to this one island and all he finds are these three old guys living on this island by themselves. And he starts preaching the Gospel to them and they said, "Oh, we know about Jesus." He says, "Really? Tell me the story." He says, "Oh, yes, years ago the Holy Man he came to us and he told us about God and he talked to us about Jesus and he taught us how to pray." And this missionary says, "So how do you pray?" He said, "Oh, well, we look up to God and say 'You are three and we are three and we love you as you've loved us.'"

"How quaint," says the missionary, "That's a very nice sentiment but let me teach you to pray properly." And so he begins to teach them the Lord's Prayer. And they struggle with this Elizabethan English, all this stuff, they have the hardest time but finally he thinks that they're far enough long that he can leave them with their prayer. So he waits and finally the ship arrives and he rows out to the ship and as he's climbing aboard the sailors on the deck are astonished and they're pointing back towards the shore. And he climbs up on deck and he looks out and to his astonishment he sees one of the old men

hurrying across the water toward the ship, *walking on the water*. And he's shouting, "Pastor, pastor, we forgot the words. Please teach us!"

And he shouts back, "My brother, go with your old prayer!"

It's not about becoming a great intellectual in this but it's about truly maturing in the faith. And it takes that constant daily bread. We all need to establish daily practices of prayer and spiritual reading, of study, of good works, and of reflection because otherwise our growth is stunted and we grow through life as little itty-bitty Christians. Not growing into the fullness of Christ but living in stunted ignorance.

It's not about searching until you find all the right answers but it's about opening those eyes of the heart so that we can see into life around us and see and bask in the vision of God in all things.

Amen.