

October 25, 2014
Reformation and Confirmation
1 Kings 3:4-28
Pastor Chris Bellefeuille

God asks Solomon: "Ask what I should give you." It's a question we recognize. History, film and literature are full of stories of people seeking something, going before the seat of power to ask for what they desire, what they are greedy for, what they are lacking.

- Harry Potter sits before the Mirror of Erised longing for his family.
- In the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow face apple-throwing trees, flying monkeys and an evil witch in order to get what they need from the great and powerful Oz.
- Frodo hikes into the bowels of enemy territory to toss a ring into the heart of a mountain but not until people have murdered and people have died in pursuit of the power the ring possesses.
- Martin Luther nails his petition for the reform of his beloved church to the doors of the Castle Church seeking a reformation of holy practice and a return to a long forgotten gospel of grace.
- And Solomon and his older brother Adonijah manipulate others for the throne.

Taken as a whole, it would be easy to see human beings as grasping, longing, yearning people...always seeking that which we do not have. Sometimes nobly, sometimes with evil intent, sometimes not even sure why we want what we think we want. It is, I think largely true. We are people of longing. We all feel the yearning for something more, something else, something sometimes ineffable and unnamable.

In Harry Potter, the headmaster Dumbledore finds Harry seated before the magical mirror of Erised gazing at an image of himself standing between his parents, whom he lost ten years earlier. Dumbledore asks Harry if he understands how the mirror works. Harry takes a guess and Dumbledore gives him a hint: The happiest man in the world would see only himself in the mirror. Because the mirror shows only the deepest longing of our hearts. And the happiest man in the world longs for nothing. Can you imagine? What it would feel like to long for nothing?

Having such a magical mirror would be an amazing thing. Because I know the longing but I am not sure I know what the deepest longing of my heart is. How about you?

Solomon, having managed to seize the throne from his dying father's hands, stands at a high place making an offering when God appears to him in a dream and says: "Ask what I should give you." God is not asking Solomon a question. God is actually commanding him: "Tell me what you want from me." How would you answer that question? This is no mere genie appearing to the call of a magical lamp. This is the Creator of the Universe, the one who actually has the power to give whatever is asked. What would you answer if God asked you "What do you want?"

Earlier this week I was on the phone with our son, Sam. He goes to school in Maine and had decided to transfer back to the Midwest at Christmas. Until this week. Now he is thinking he might stay in Maine. Not just for the rest of the year but to complete his degree. But he doesn't know. He is struggling to decide. He said, "Mom, I just wish I knew what I should do. I wish I knew the right decision. What do I want?" He could use a Mirror of Erised.

Some years ago during the Miss Universe pageant, they had reached the final five candidates and were doing the interviews. You know this part: where we joke that the only right answer to any interview question is “world peace.” Miss Argentina was asked: “What would you do if you had only 24 hours to live.” Standing there on the world’s stage, in front of a live television audience, this young woman answered: “I would eat whatever I want.” A profoundly honest answer for someone had likely been on a diet since she was 15 years old! Even so, it so, as honest and true as her answer was: was it really what she would do if she really had 24 hours left to live? Was that the deepest longing of her heart?

So I ask again. “What do you want?” Ted and I love the talk about what we would do if we won the Powerball. That kind of money has to represent the ability to do something amazing. But then we realized the millions couldn’t repair his 84 year old father’s failing heart, it couldn’t cure our daughter’s depression, it couldn’t bring back a forest of 500 year old pines or the clouds of monarchs that used to populate the summer sky and it couldn’t solve Sam’s dilemma over which school to attend. The money would be awesome, but the money cannot touch the longings of our hearts.

Gwen and Adam, today the question about what you want is posed to you in a new way. You will stand up here in a few minutes to affirm your baptism. You will answer the questions that your parents answered on your behalf when you were very little. You will promise to do the best you can to stay in this life of faith that began at the font so many years ago. You will take up the mantle of disciple of Jesus Christ. And you will begin a journey of discovering who God has shaped and gifted you to be in the world. We are excited to see where your journey with

God will take you, to see the vocations to which you are called and the ways in which you will uniquely live your lives in service of God and love of neighbor.

Very likely, in this moment, you have no idea what you want: what your life is going to look like, what job you will have, who you will love. You may know that you are anxious to get the next few minutes over with because it's hard and unnerving to stand up here in front of everyone and say stuff and be fussed over. You may know it's hard sometimes to show up here on Sunday mornings and that church stuff isn't always as appealing as the other things that fill your busy lives. But beyond that, it's an open question.

So here are some thoughts to take with you. Take some time to ask *yourself*: What do I want? That's not a question about getting stuff...you know that. You certainly don't want other people to decide that for you. You probably don't want even God to tell you what you want. But I invite you to prayerfully ponder the question because more than anything the question is an opportunity to wonder with God and to wonder with the people who love you. It more like asking: Who am I? Who did God make me to be? Who is my most authentic self?

Here is a thing to consider. Solomon was king. Being king seems like kind of a great thing. Being large and in charge, popular, rich and admired. But being king costs a lot. It costs money to build temples and castles, great edifices to show your enemies how powerful you are. It costs money to create monuments with inscriptions advertising your accomplishments. It costs money to give gifts of goods and food to stay in the good graces of the upper echelons of society, to stay popular with the ones who have the ability to keep you in power or to turn you

over to your enemies. Eventually, even Solomon, with all his wisdom, collapsed under the burden of keeping up his kingly appearances.

That's why the question "what do I want" must be paired with the question of "who am I?" Because trying to win the approval of others by being a person that is not authentic for you will wear you out. Keeping up appearances will consume your energy, your money, your time and eventually will consume your friendships and your sense of self.

You probably know the Colbie Callait song "Try." Even though it's sung by a woman and uses themes directed at girls, the message is just as powerful for boys. You don't have to try so hard. You don't have to give it all away. You just have to get up. You don't have to change a single thing. Just be who God created you to be.

That's why hauling yourself out of bed and getting to church makes a difference. Because, believe or not, here is where you can hear again and again the words that will help you answer the question "Who am I." We are your mirror. We cannot tell you the longings of your heart but we can show you who you are. Here we will remind you that you are a child of God. You are created in the image of God. You are created by God simply because God delights in you. And you are empowered by God to bring love to the world. That is who you are. That is who we are. And we all need to be reminded.

No magazines, movies, advertisers or any message on the internet can tell you more about who you are than what you can discover in partnership with the God who made you and in the company of the people who have pledged to share that journey with you. God bless you, Gwen and Adam. We love you. We support you. Let us be the mirror of God's love for you. Amen.