

**Eighth Sunday after Pentecost A
Incarnation Lutheran Church**

EVEN BEFORE WE ASK

ON THE SATURDAY BEFORE WE LEFT FOR VACATION, I TOOK A LITTLE TIME JUST TO READ THROUGH THE LESSONS FOR THIS DAY - THINKING I PROBABLY WOULD HAVE SOME TIME ON THAT RIVER BOAT JUST TO REFLECT ON WHAT DIRECTION TODAY'S SERMON MIGHT TAKE.. AND SO I TUCKED IN MY HEAD THESE WORDS OF JESUS ABOUT THE TREASURES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, PAUL'S WORDS TO THE CHURCH AT ROME ABOUT HOW NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD, THE WORDS FROM PSALM 119 PRAYING THAT GOD WILL KEEP OUR FOOTSTEPS STEADY IN THE FAITH - BUT IT WAS THE PASSAGE FROM I KINGS THAT HAUNTED ME THE WHOLE TIME I WAS AWAY. GOD SAYS TO SOLOMON - "ASK WHAT I SHOULD GIVE YOU." ASK WHAT I SHOULD GIVE YOU! AND SO I KEPT ASKING MYSELF, IF GOD SAID THIS TO ME, WHAT WOULD I ASK FOR? AND I IMMEDIATELY KNEW MY ANSWERS. OUR DAUGHTER HAS STRUGGLED WITH HEALTH ISSUES MOST OF HER ADULT LIFE - SO MY FIRST REQUEST WOULD BE HEALING FOR HER. AND NEXT, I THOUGHT ABOUT HER SON TYLER, WHO AFTER SERVING 7 MONTHS IN IRAQ RETURNED WITH PTSD - AND STUGGLES TO GET HIS LIFE BACK ON TRACK - AND SO I WOULD ASK FOR HEALING FOR HIM. BUT THEN, I GOT TO WONDERING - WHAT WOULD OTHER PEOPLE ASK FOR - AND SO I BEGAN TO ASK. I SENT E-MAILS TO SOME FRIENDS AND I ASKED THE WORSHIPPERS AT THE 12:10 COMMUNION SERVICE THIS PAST WEDNESDAY THAT SAME QUESTION: "IF GOD SAID TO YOU, ASK ME FOR ONE THING AND I WILL GRANT

IT, WHAT WOULD YOU ASK FOR?" SOME RESPONDED AS I DID – ASKING FOR HEALING FOR SPECIFIC PERSONS AND OTHERS ASKING FOR HEALING FOR ALL THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM LIFE-DEBILITATING AND LIFE- THREATENING DISEASES. OTHERS ASKED FOR PEACE – PEACE IN OUR HOMES, IN OUR NATION, IN THE WORLD. OTHERS ASKED THAT ALL OF US WOULD SEE EACH AND EVERY PERSON – REGARDLESS OF RACE, CREED, COLOR, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, OR ANYTHING ELSE – THAT WE WOULD SEE IN ALL PERSONS, INCLUDING OURSELVES – SOMEONE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THEREFORE SOMEONE WE RESPECT AND TREAT WITH DIGNITY. ONE PERSON WROTE, "GOD, I KNOW YOU HAVE GIVEN ME A SOUND MIND AND GOOD ABILITY. HELP ME SHOW YOUR LOVE TO OTHERS AND USE MY EXPERIENCE TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS WITH COMFORT. HELP ME ALWAYS STAND IN FAITH AND KEEP MY FOCUS ON YOU WHEN UNEXPECTED CIRCUMSTANCES ARISE." AND FINALLY THEN, ONE PERSON SIMPLE WROTE, "WISDOM."

THAT WAS SOLOMON'S REQUEST – AND THEREIN LIES THE FIRST SURPRISE IN TODAY'S SCRIPTURE TEXTS BEFORE US. SOLOMON, THE THIRD KING OF ISRAEL, SON OF KING DAVID – AND AS ONE COMMENTATOR DESCRIBED HIM PRIOR TO HIS BECOMING KING - "... MUCH CLOSER TO A MODEL SCUMBAG THAN TO THE PERFECT BOY" -THIS SOLOMON IS HIS FATHER'S CHOICE FOR HIS SUCCESSOR AND AFTER A BATTLE WITH HIS OLDER BROTHER ADONIJAH, HE IS ANOINTED KING OF ISRAEL. AND AT GIBEON, A PLACE OF WORSHIP, GOD COMES TO SOLOMON IN A DREAM AND SAYS, "ASK WHAT I SHOULD GIVE YOU" - AND SOLOMON ASKS FOR WISDOM –

AN UNDERSTANDING MIND TO GOVERN GOD'S PEOPLE, ABILITY TO DISCERN BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL. EUGENE PETERSON IN *THE MESSAGE* SAYS SOLOMON ASKS FOR "A GOD-LISTENING HEART." AND GOD GRANTS THAT GOD-LISTENING HEART TO SOLOMON. HE REIGNS - WITH THAT GOD-LISTENING HEART - FOR CLOSE TO 40 YEARS OVER A PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS ISRAEL.

THAT'S THE FIRST SURPRISE IN TODAY'S SCRIPTURE TEXTS - THAT SOLOMON WOULD ASK FOR WISDOM RATHER THAN THE WEALTH OR FAME - BUT AN EVEN GREATER SURPRISE IS FOUND IN OUR SECOND READING - THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE CHURCH IN ROME. PAUL ASKS, "WHO WILL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST?" AND I LOVE PAUL'S ANSWER AS TRANSLATED IN THE LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE: "I AM CONVINCED," PAUL AVOWS, "THAT NOTHING CAN EVER SEPARATE US FROM CHRIST'S LOVE. DEATH CAN'T, AND THE ANGELS CAN'T. OUR FEARS OF TODAY, OUR WORRIES ABOUT TOMORROW, AND EVEN THE POWERS OF HELL CAN'T KEEP GOD'S LOVE AWAY. WHETHER WE ARE HIGH ABOVE THE SKY OR IN THE DEEPEST OCEAN, NOTHING IN ALL CREATION, WILL EVER BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS REVELAED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD."

THAT'S THE BIGGEST, MOST AWESOME SURPRISE IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE, FOR YOU SEE, BEFORE WE ASK OF GOD ANYTHING, BEFORE WE EVEN KNOW TO ASK, IN FACT AS THE ABSOLUTION IN OUR ORDER FOR CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS SAYS - WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS - CHRIST DIED FOR US. THAT'S WITHOUT OUR ASKING OR KNOWING - THAT'S

**WITHOUT OUR GOOD WORKS – THAT’S WITHOUT ANYTHING ON OUR PART.
GOD, THROUGH THE CROSS, GIVES US THE BEST GIFT OF ALL – FORGIVENESS OF
SIN AND LIFE – NEW LIFE IN CHRIST – WHICH BEGINS NOW AND NEVER ENDS.
WE CALL THAT GRACE. AND THAT LEADS ME TO MY FAVORITE STORY ABOUT
GRACE.**

BOB HOCK’S CAT STORY

**AND BECAUSE OF THAT GRACE – WE, TOO, LIKE SOLOMON THEN, PRAY
FOR LISTENING HEARTS.**