



David and Nathan the Prophet by Angelika Kauffman

The Collect this morning is partly a lament. A lament that, because of our feelings of brokenness, there are things that we dare not ask God for. Do we, because of our feelings of un-worthiness sometimes forgo asking God for our heart's desire? Part of our walk with The Lord is in walking humbly with our God. yes, but the other side of that coin is never forgetting how greatly we are loved. So, come boldly before the throne with our petitions, his word says. Yet, if God knows what we need before we ask, as the Collect says, then there must be another reason for prayer besides just a wish list. I've been wondering this week if a large part of prayer is all about coming home.

Doubtless, you've heard "You can never go home." That's meant to remind people that once we can never really return to a place that exists only in our happy memories. (Heraclitus famously said a man can never step twice into the same river). And, of course, time is a gentleman, so the home we remember doesn't exist anymore, maybe it never has. The way he is hard-wired to survive in this world enables man to sort of push into the background of our memories the pain of this life. Instead we bring into the center stage of our memories those wonder-filled happy times that we cherish. That's just one of the ways that Our Loving Father has provided in order to keep hope alive within us.

But, here's the question this morning: "How do we get home?" How do we return to that state of peace and joy which lives so bright in our memories? How do we get back to the happiness of the garden, when the first man and women walked companionably with God in the cool of the evening? How do we get back to that state of restful peace with God and fulfillment in our lives?

Well, maybe one way to get back to that place of peace has to do with fixing dinner. Of all the memories that I cherish, one of my very fondest has to do with Summer-time meals served on the back-porch of my grandparents' house in Edgefield, South Carolina. On Sunday after church, we would all sit down to an amazing Sunday lunch. There would be fried chicken, sweet potato casserole with melted marshmallows, buttermilk biscuits, rice with made from scratch gravy, cake **and** ice-cream, and sweet tea served with sprigs of mint picked fresh from the back-yard garden.

Maybe this critical place which food has in our memories is the reason why so much of the Gospel account takes place around the dinner table. This morning, in Mark 6 we hear about a miracle performed at lunch time. And isn't it interesting that as He's getting ready to feed these thousands of people with 5 loaves and two fish, first Jesus says to the twelve men who were closest to him, "You give them something to eat" (Mk.6:37) And the disciples are flummoxed. How are they supposed to serve dinner to this hoard of people? Yet, Jesus' instructions are clear, "You give them something to eat"... "You give my children something to eat," Jesus says. That's really what the Christian witness is all about you know. The Christian witness to the Gospel is really nothing more than one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. As Christians, you and I are expected to serve dinner. That's how we are to bring people home.

All of us are looking for exactly the same thing in this life. Donna will go into a meeting with the mental image that every person at that meeting has a sign hung around their neck that says something like, "Make me feel special!" We're all that way. We all have that kind of sign hung around our neck. We all want to feel loved, and cherished, and respected, and worthy. But this broken world isn't particularly good at making us feel any of those things. So, many people go through life with half empty souls, bearing that horribly empty place in Themselves, the immense emptiness of a God-sized hole that drills deep down to the very bottom of our souls. Yet, we all want to be healed, and be home.

Now, coming home and building a house isn't at all the same thing. In the Old Testament Lesson this morning, David decides he's going to build God a house. Yes, in this period of his life, David decides he's going to build a great and wonderful palace for God to live in. And so he commits an error which is so often made by Christians in positions of leadership. Having become familiar with taking the initiative, David strikes out on his own plan without first stopping to prayerfully consider whether or not this particular endeavor is truly God's will. Oh, and there may also be some significant egoism involved in this particular civil engineering project that David is undertaking!

We often do this to varying degrees. Convinced that we know best, and that we have discerned the end which God has intended, we forge ahead with our plans, only to discover that God had something else completely different in mind. And God's objectives for us are almost always so much better than anything we've contemplated. (See Eph. 3:20) This is also a pitfall to which churches and their congregations are susceptible. Well-meaning Christians will often strike out on an initiative, only to discover further down the road a staggering surprise.

They discover that God had laid that particular ministry on someone else's heart to be done in some other way. Another conclusion I've as I prepare for my second decade in ordained ministry is that frequently, when God inspires a group of people to pursue a particular mission, or ministry, or Christian service, the outcome that matters to God isn't about earthly results at all. Instead, the whole time, God is working on the relationships that exist between those Christian brothers and sisters, building his Kingdom through the bonds of love that he strengthens in our work together. And this is only possible if the fellowship of believers is willing to hold loosely any authority of ministry. There is no ownership of ministry in the body of Christ. There is no exclusive authority in any Christian ministry, save the authority of Christ himself. I've come to understand that the richness and strength of Christian fellowship is so much more important to Our Lord than the quality of a particular worship service, or the number of people that turn up for a ministry event. But that enrichment of the bonds of Christian fellowship is only possible if we are willing to truly forswear any sense of entitlement to any portion of the church's ministry. We must hold this treasure in our jar of clay. And that clay is truly the very fabric which we all share in the fellowship of servanthood to each other. A fellowship in which we all partake only if we truly are one body of many loving parts.

Yet sadly, we often stride forth into the ministries of the church, with a determination to do great things for the Lord – yes, determined to this work – but set on a path that *we* have determined is best. We frequently don't stop to think, and ponder, and pray, and contemplate the possibility that there may be another way which we have not seen yet, a road which God has yet to reveal in his time, through his will, and by his means. And there may be, perish the thought, there may be ministries in which we are NOT to lead, but instead to follow and support the leadership of someone else. That is what it means to hold loosely the ministries of the church. Because, sometimes, we are NOT called to lead, or instruct, or build. Sometimes we are called to listen, and learn, and simply be in the presence of God and bask in the fellowship of his Son. Because if we're too busy hammering on God's house, we'll never come home. *The Master spoke, but I scarcely heard, above the noise and din; of hurrying feet and hammer stroke. I was building a house for Him. Then He took me aside and He taught me this, while earthly things grew dim; He would rather a place in this heart of mine, than the house I was building for Him.*

Christ tells us that if they want to really be His witness to the world, we must learn to be a servant to all (see Mk.9:35; 10:44; Mt.23:11). That particular command of Jesus is so important because of the wondrous way this "servant-hood" works in our lives. By living our lives to serve Jesus and our fellow man, soon we find that this life of servant-hood produces an abundant blessing in us. It gives us a new way, a more vivid and wonderful way to see the world and all those around us. And if we persist in this life of faithful service, very soon this servant-hood actually becomes our reward and blessing. And we do come home.

In Ephesians this morning, Paul talks about Christ breaking down a wall which until His incarnation had divided the Jews from the Gentiles (see Eph.2:14). But there is another kind of wall *within* each of us which divides our broken selves from the complete, fulfilled man or woman that we all long to be. And praise be to God, that with the coming of Christ into our lives and by the might power of the Holy Spirit, that wall has come crumbling down, and you and I can truly become the beautiful, grace-filled children of God we were all created to be. We can truly come home & discover this peace. When we submit ourselves willingly to that humble service of The Lord, the most astounding thing happens.

It's what Cranmer was praying for in the opening collect "Almighty God...have compassion we beseech thee upon our unworthiness and...give to us the worthiness of thy Son, Jesus Christ" (see Collect, 8th Sunday in Trinity). You see, the truly miraculous thing is that when we embrace willingly the humble service of a faithful follower of Jesus, when we come to understand how truly unworthy we all are to receive the infinite depth of His love, then – wonder of wonders – we discover that we are none-the-less the very apple of God's eye. We begin to understand just a little of how deep is the Father's love for us. Then, yes, we can finally feel wonderfully, completely, gloriously, at home.

To serve The Lord: that is our song. If we can embrace our service to him with a whole and humble heart. If we can prepare and equip ourselves for this service by prayer and the word to be effective witnesses to the glory of The Gospel. If we can discover the deep need to be servants of The Lord, and fill that need with the completeness of that peace which is the blessing of the redeemed. Then, it's true, our hearts really do come to rest in Him. And then... and then... we really can come home. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

jwb† 07/20/18