

# Wading River Congregational Church

## SERMONS IN PRINT

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John 6:51-58

"What God Expects"

**What does God expect from each of us?**, this is a query as old as theology itself. In our first reading from 1 Kings, we read about the weight of the nation of Israel placed on Solomon's shoulders at 20. **God comes to Solomon in a dream saying, "Ask what I should give you?"** In this time the people of Israel beseeched God to give them a king, for they thought that their fortunes would improve like those of the kingdoms who were threatening them who had kings. Close reading of the Scriptures reveals that "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your **servant king** in place of my father David" (1 Kings 3:7). Solomon will be "**servant**" king to his people. So we begin to discern that what God has in mind for Solomon, by Solomon's own words, he is to be a "**servant**" to his people.

**At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."** (1 Kings 5). Here we see that Solomon seeks 2 intertwined gifts from God: an understanding mind and the ability to discern between good and evil. Solomon does not request riches, long life, death for his enemies, undeserved honor, a better job, a new house, a better circumstance for himself, only an understanding mind capable of discerning good from evil.

**What about you and I? What does God expect from us and what gifts do we request from the Lord?** Maybe God only expects that which God asked of Solomon, which reflected also on King David, the most revered leader of Israel, when

God said to Solomon, "**if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.**" This advice is both simple and profound, and so absolutely true. It was true in the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon. It is true today, August 2009.

But this is only the beginning of our story today, because it reaches back to the heritage of God's promise to Abraham and we are the children of Abraham. Our reading of Psalm 111 brings us further along on this story,

<sup>7</sup>The works of his hands are faithful and just;

all his precepts are trustworthy.

<sup>8</sup>They are established for ever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

<sup>9</sup>He sent redemption to his people; he has ordained his covenant for ever.

This psalm attributed to David tells us that God has established with the people of God a covenant, one that will last for ever and ever. **But how does God insure that the covenant and commands will be ordained for ever and ever?** For us to address this part of the journey of our story we must move forward more than 600 years to the letters of the apostle Paul to the Romans and to the Ephesians (5:19,20).

Paul relates the teachings, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>12</sup>And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

Paul continues in Ephesians (5:19,20)

<sup>19</sup>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup>always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul recognized that to help us to understand the essential question of our theology, **"What does God expect from us?"** we need to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We wonder to ourselves in those quiet moments of sorrow, of grief, and of despair, **"What does God expect from us?"** The loss of our job, our income, our way of life as we knew it makes us wonder, **"What does God expect from us?"**. When our relationships sour, when our loved ones seem so distant, when we have been unable to reach out emotionally to those around us for comfort in an hour of need, we wonder, **"What does God expect from us?"**

For we as Christians, the answer to this query would seem to be straightforward. We offer deep thanksgivings in our daily prayers to God, thanking God for the most precious gift of pure grace that enters into our lives, that of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. In parables and by example Jesus offers to us the answer to our query, **"What does God expect from us?"** Jesus was very clear as to who sent Him and that Jesus himself did not seek to be

worshiped. The Gospel of John is the focus of our second reading. John tells us in 3:16:

<sup>16</sup>"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. <sup>19</sup>This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

**God expects us**, like Solomon to have an understanding mind and to discern good from evil. **God expects us** to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all your strength and with all our mind' ; and, 'Love our neighbor as ourselves.' But often our lamentations are not so broadly focused on what God expects. More often we are really disappointed in our lives, become estranged and frustrated with our lives and lament to God, **"What does God expect from me?"** We are tired, forlorn, anxious, unhappy and we turn to God not with prayers of thanks for the very blessings of another day of life, but with lamentations about the things in our lives that trouble or torment us.

When we share the sacrament of communion together, aren't we inspired? We share the body and blood of our Lord and Savior not as a habit,

but as a sacrament to find strength through the Lord, with the Lord, in the Lord. For Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord and He his teachings answer for us in our daily prayers, **“What does God expect from us?”**

Most recently I have devoted many months to clinical chaplaincy training. It has been the most sacred and privileged effort of my ministry, and clearly the most challenging. To enter into the moment of another human being who is actively dying, facing their finitude, and trying to review their lives has been a sacred privilege. Often it is the unexpected death, the early death, or the long painful death that focuses our attention on answering the query,

**“What does God expect from us?”** I would encounter a suffering soul, suffering from a methicillin-resistant and/or vancomycin-resistant infections, with open weeping wounds, compromised, and often losing the battle. In the estrangement, frustration, and isolation (I would be gowned, gloved, and using a face mask and shield), they would ask **“What does God expect from me?”** **Where, they would ask, is God in this? Where is the beneficence?, the goodness?, and the grace in this?** Often, I would look deeply into their eyes and share with them that yes I could feel their anger, feel their pain, feel their sadness and exhaustion and say in deep sincerity, “You and I were strangers, friend, now we are sharing your pain and suffering.....who do you think sent me? God is working through us all, we are His agents here on Earth.” Over the months, I traveled with my patients from illness to recovery, and with some to their passing, while meeting and sharing with their families, friends, and loved ones. Every one of their stories, their pains, and their smiles are etched on surface of my heart. At these times, in the moment of my patients, I would query myself, **“What does God expect from me?”** But for me, the answer was clear, I knew what he expected of me.

Our second reading, from the Gospel of John (John 6: 51), provides us even more from the teachings of Jesus as Jesus answered, **“What does God expect from me?”**

<sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

These are but examples, not all inclusive, not exhaustive, but telling perhaps about what our life in God through Jesus Christ can be. Maybe it is holding the door for someone behind us, or sitting with someone who is home-bound and lonely, or setting aside some food, if possible, for those who have less? Maybe **“Doing what God expects?”** will be some act of forgiveness for some unkindness that we have held for so long?, or learning to turn to God through Jesus Christ when we are feeling overwhelmed and cut-off from the Holy Spirit?

There are many questions and we still may ask how we can be expected to deal with all of life’s calamities and misfortunes, especially when they seem to arrive in bunches? Well, I do not have answers for all of the questions that must be racing through your mind in this sermon. But there are three things that we should all remember when we feel like asking **“What does God expect from me?”**

**#1. We can turn to God, rather than away from God, when life’s expectations and frustrations seem overwhelming.** How often have we read into a situation and concluded, in error on our own, that God has turned away from us and our

suffering. God is always with us, in the midst of our suffering, God lifts us up.

**#2. We can turn to each other through Christian love, when life's expectations and frustrations seem overwhelming.** We are not alone, we are a congregation of Jesus' disciples, here on a mission, following the plan of the Lord. We fulfill God's expectations when we use our understanding mind to discern good from evil.

**#3. We have the love of Jesus Christ, the grace of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to support us.** I was saying good-bye to a cancer patient who had suffered dearly, who was being transferred to hospice care at home, and who had at times lost her faith in God while in the moment of agony. We spoke many times of finding our way to the Spirit in every day; hard words to live, my friends, for someone who can count her remaining days on one hand. I said to her "These few coming days are so precious, you can share all the feelings and love that was hidden from so many friends and family, and they also with you. That is the Spirit of God and the love of Jesus at work in your life." She looked up into my eyes with a sincere smile and teary eyes saying, "If I could get out of this bed, I would give you a hug." She had come to discern with her understanding mind (like Solomon) the answer to the query "**What does God expect from me?**". ANSWER: God never expects more from us than we can give. God created us and understands well the burden of our humanness as well as our capacity to fulfill **all that God expects** from each and every one of us.

**Let us pray.**