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Supplemental sermon, 1 Kings 3:5-12 – Pentecost 10A

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What do you want?

What do you want? And I'm not a fast food worker here asking you "What'll ya have? What'll ya have? What'll ya have?"¹ I have a feeling you want more than just a chili cheese dog and some onion rings. As tasty as that may sound, and by the way – that is the right order at the Varsity. But even as tasty as that might be, I'm asking you more than that. I'm asking you, what do you want out of your life?

I know, we can quickly fill a list of things we want to have or do, things we might want our families to experience, but why? Why do we want those things? What is the goal? What is it really we are trying to get at? Today, I want us to first put our focus past all the steps along the way and figure out where we're trying to go. What do you want out of life? Why do we want the stuff we want or want to do the things we want to do?

Take a minute and try to answer that question. You know, some of the wisest among us might say, "Well, it's not so much any destination. I want the journey." "I want life, not for the sake of accomplishing any one thing in particular, but life for its own sake." OK, great – so what do you want that life to be?

Here's where we might get religious, right? Pastor's asking this in the sermon – so the answer probably is supposed to be something about God, right? So, how about this? "Heaven." That's what I want. Ok, yes we want heaven next, but what about now? What do we want in this life?

Maybe it will be easier to think about it if we remove it one step. Forget for a moment about all the things you've tried and failed, all the ways you've lived life that haven't always been the answer. Think next generation. What do you want for your kids or grandkids?

These are important questions to answer, aren't they? Because they will dictate what we do. They will determine what our lives look like, what I choose to do, and the decisions I make in raising my children, so that I can get to the life that I want.

Let's say I'm planting a garden. If I want a garden so that I can eat fresh vegetables, I'm not going to plant all flowers. If I want something pretty to look at and smell, I'm not going to plant onions. If I want tomatoes, well, I need to plant tomato seeds. It's pretty basic – but, friends, the majority of our world's population, while they may think ahead to what they want in their garden or at a fast food restaurant and act accordingly – they don't think ahead to what they want out of life. And all too often we join in and plant the wrong thing, and forget why we are here. So today, let's remedy that. Today, let's try to answer the question, "What do you want?"

Our text is the account of Solomon being asked that question by God. And there is a lesson for us here. Solomon has just taken over the throne of his father David. He's king of a world superpower. He's

¹ "The Varsity" is an iconic Atlanta drive-in famous for their chili dogs, orange freezes, and a slew of cashiers shouting out "What'll ya have?" as every customer approaches. It's their thing.

probably around 20 years old. He's got a pretty bright future. And God comes to him in the middle of the night and gives him one wish.

Can you imagine that? We've all seen or read the story of the genie in the lamp. You rub it, the genie pops out and the offer is made. Have you ever played that game? What would you ask for? A million dollars? Some amazing experience? Or do you think ahead a little? Instead of a million dollars, you ask for the government approved \$100 bill printing press. Instead of any experience, you ask for more wishes. There it is, right? Then, with each wish you get more and more of what you want. And you can keep asking for more wishes. The perfect answer.

If you think about it, that's kind of what Solomon asked for. But he wasn't asking it of a fictional genie. He was asking of God. And look at how he came to his answer for what he wanted. He realized his situation and what he needed and he realized of whom he was asking it.

So, what was his situation? What did he need? Well, he was in charge of an entire nation. He was the chief justice, actually the only justice on Israel's Supreme Court. He was the Chief commanding officer of Israel's military. He was Israel's public relations director, their chamber of commerce and director of the Board of education. He was responsible for everything for his people. The buck stopped there. And he didn't even know how many of them there were!! Add to that that he was brand new on the job, a job he had been given by God.

Have you ever felt overwhelmed? Whatever overwhelmed you, I'm pretty sure it was nothing compared to Solomon's situation. He had a job he was not equipped for, and it was kind of an important, kind of a high profile job. But the beauty of it was - he realized it. He saw that he needed help.

Are we there yet, or do we think we've got our situations handled? Does God need to pile a bit more on before we realize the truth, that like Solomon that we are incapable of handling it on our own? ...that we need his help?

Now, of course, we don't have a government to run – and the list of your responsibilities probably vary from individual to individual – but between the demands of being a child or a parent, a boss or employee, a spouse, a citizen, a neighbor, a friend, even just a Christian like we talked about last week – that job description in itself is too much for you to handle on your own. Remember, just by being a Christian you are a minister, a missionary, an ambassador.

If we're honest, we're right there with Solomon, "I'm not fit for the task". Verse 7, **"I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties."** "I don't know how to do what you're asking me, Lord. I need your help."

Actually, more accurately, he answered, "Lord, I need **you**." Do you see how that changes it? Instead of focusing on what we want, the question is changed to who we want.

I mean, everyone knows Solomon asked for wisdom, right? Well, kind of. But really, the Hebrew word for wisdom isn't there. What he asked for was, real literally, a heart that hears. As he was speaking with God he asked for a heart that hears God. Now, he wanted a heart that hears in order to govern God's people with wisdom and distinguish between right and wrong – that's why he wanted it – but what he asked for was a heart that hears God.

Think of how powerful that is. Instead of a what, he asked for a Whom. Instead of riches he asked for relationship. Now, before, I said that Solomon asked for the equivalent of more wishes. Do you see what I mean? He asked that he'd be able to hear God – that he would keep listening, and in so doing,

he'd have God's power and God's presence. And God was pleased with that request. So he told Solomon what that would result in. With God, he would have all the other things that could be considered good – riches, fame, wisdom, power, money, money, and more money. That's if you consider an annual income of more than 25 tons of gold riches. Solomon didn't ask for a what, he asked for a Whom. He asked to be able to hear God.

So – now back to you and me. What does that mean?

What are we asking for? God has given us the open offer of prayer. What do we ask for? Tell me, do you fall into the same trap I too often do? Is your answer to what you want so self-serving that it ignores the giver for the gift? "I want happiness Lord, I want health" Maybe even, "I want you to bless someone else." Yes, those are great things, but if we're looking at God as a vending machine, we're missing the real blessing. And then, if we don't get what we ask for – it seems like God failed. It seems pointless to ask, and faith is shaken, and our prayer did more harm to us than good. Instead of asking God to hear us with our list of demands, let's ask for a heart that hears God. Let's ask Him for a relationship with Him

And then, before we hear anything else, we'll hear his love. Instead of living like all the other voices matter more, we'll hear his forgiveness and realize what he means to us. Because he is pleased to give that gift – a hearing heart, a heart that pays attention to God's Word, trained by God's voice, governed by God's will – so that we can carry out our duties. Let's ask for God with us.

And let's live that answer. Let's let our hearts hear. Is it starting to make sense why this is the text for Christian Education Sunday? Think of what an opportunity you have to train your hearing heart. If, like Solomon, a hearing heart is your request when given one wish – you are in the right place. Here in worship your heart hears of God's love for you in the payment of sins God made on that cross. In our many Bible Studies – your heart learns to listen to God's guidance for your life. In the books that are available at the book fair today and in our library – your hearts practice hearing God at home. If you really want a hearing heart – I'd expect you'd make use of that.

Like the lottery winner who wants their money, you'd expect they'd go pick it up from the lottery office – God has answered your prayer for wisdom. Pick it up. Live like it really is important – and just like Solomon, he adds everything else as well.

And, same thing for your kids. If your wish for them is God's presence, well – don't let them miss a week here. Get them in Sunday School. Get them to Wednesdays in the Word. Spend time with them in the Word at home. That's if your wish for them is God's presence.

But if your wish is that they consider worldly wisdom and the influence of society more important – then act like school is more of a commitment than church or Sunday School or confirmation class.

Or if your wish is that they consider fame and fortune more important than God's presence – act like that – and make sure that they don't miss a practice or a game. Teach them that time with God comes after athletics or their hobby, and only if you are feeling like it.

Or if your wish is that they be self-centered and slothful, well then, make sure they have the option of sleep instead of church or video games instead of Sunday School.

Now, of course, those things are not our desire – but that they have a hearing heart. So, listening to God tell us "You are forgiven for all your failures," let's ask God to continue to train our hearing hearts. That's exactly what we want.

In Christ, Amen.