

## “What Would You Ask For?”

(1 Kings: 3)

A sacred season is about to come to a close. But what I am thinking about here is not the conclusion of summer vacation from school. I am not talking about the abrupt end of wedding invitations in your mailbox. Rather, we are nearing the end of the holy endeavor of summer garage sales. To be sure, there are still a couple of good weekends left, a few stragglers will keep pounding signs into the ground on street corners early on Saturday mornings in September. And of course, there is always Craig’s List and indoor flea markets for those who are gung-ho about garage sales. But who are we kidding? The thrill of hunting for treasures while sipping steaming coffee from a mug in those hours before the summer sun hits its zenith have passed for yet another year.

To be honest, I am a lukewarm garage sale participant at best. As I wander around tables set up in driveways what I usually find my mind doing is creatively coming up with stories about the family whose one-time treasure is now marked down to a quarter. But, other members of my family embrace this summer tradition fully and enthusiastically! Of course, to Ethan and Olivia every trinket is a treasure. A “My Little Pony” with a broken leg for **only ten cents!** Or a Batman puzzle with **only** three pieces missing for a nickel, how can you pass up those deals! Gina employs a more discerning and sophisticated approach of carefully looking over the classifieds for key words and scouring the internet. In the midst of this frenzied excitement, I become more than a spectator, I am the chauffeur.

Garage sales are an important part of our Midwestern culture. People go for a variety of reasons: some go looking for a treasure at a good price and others go with curiosity to get a peek at some of the cast-off trinkets their neighbors had heretofore been keeping hidden behind closed doors and others go because they feel good about the fact that they are truly recycling and that item is now guaranteed to not be tossed in the dumpster or land fill. There is an art to being at a garage sale. The various tasks of scoping the layout as you walk up the driveway, picking up trinkets and assessing their worth verses the handwritten price, and trying to negotiate a different price with the seller, all culminate together in a matter of moments.

Over the summer, I read the book, *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tickle, where she compares our love of garage sales with what the church is going through in this time in history. In fact, Tickle contends that about every 500 years the church has a rummage sale; putting out ideas and thoughts and practices that no longer fit so as to make room for new thoughts and practices that are more reflective of our living faith today. Tickle points out 500 years ago, in the 1500s, Martin Luther (standing on the shoulders of others who had come before him) started a reformation that was a “garage sale” of ideas and practices and thoughts that Luther believed the Catholic Church needed to change. Luther

did not really intend to start a new sect of Christianity. But, as sometimes happens when we start to clean out after too many summers of visiting other people's rummage sales, things with the Reformation got a little carried away. And if you go back about 500 years before the Reformation you have the Great Schism when the church broke between the East and the West, Orthodox and Catholic, Constantinople and Rome each becoming the center of power respectively, and each side held its own rummage sale of ideas. And about 500 years before that, you have Constantine declaring Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, which led to the Council of Nicene really doing a rummage sale by committee to make clear what was kosher within the Christian church.

I've been playing with this image of a 500 year rummage sale in my mind since I read Tickle's book. I think we are in the midst of the Church and our church needing to assess what we need to hold onto and what might need to be let go. Such work is painful. What one person considers clutter in the church's practices and life and shared faith; another person might still find meaningful. So, some would say cancel the rummage sale and we can just keep adding programs or new practices or introducing new ideas until perhaps our church is so over-crowded and over-scheduled that we can barely move around or know where we are going. But friends, at some point, we all need to simplify, assess what is really needed, necessary and meaningful. We find ourselves asking the question: what we will keep and what we are willing to loosen our grip upon so our hands can be open for God's stirring in our midst in new ways in this time and in this place?

This morning, we hear how the mantle was passed from King David to Solomon. There was a change in leadership and for the first time in Israel's history a king came to the throne not based on his military might or leadership or even faithfulness or call from God, but simply because Solomon was David's son. Now, here is what most of us know about Solomon: he was wise and there is something about a baby split in two. Yup, that pretty much sums up what we learned in Sunday School. But this morning, we hear how Solomon came into that wisdom. He begins his reign with an extravagant sacrifice of one thousand burnt offerings and as the smoke of that offering billows and hours pass until the fire starts to smolder, Solomon falls asleep. In the great tradition of dreamers of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jacob and Joseph, Solomon dreams that God appears to him, and there is this genie in a bottle moment when God invites Solomon to make a wish. What would you wish for if God appeared and asked what you needed? I asked a similar question on the questionnaires I handed out several weeks. Your answers are wonderful. Some of you wish for peace on earth, economy to turn around, for people to care more about each other, to relax more, end poverty, family closer, for you to be able to change your age, and one person honestly stated too many choices and couldn't decide! Solomon wishes for wisdom. He realizes that the task of leading a people faithfully and honestly is a sacred task. He might have felt a bit overwhelmed by the shadow of his father David, he might have wondered what in the world he had gotten himself into, and

worried about whether he would be able to guide the people faithfully. Solomon asks for a discerning heart. Listen to the way Eugene Peterson translates what Solomon is asking for in *The Message*, “And now here I am; God, my God, you have made me, your servant....I don’t know the ropes, hardly know the ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ of this job. And here I am, set down in the middle of the people you’ve chosen, a great people...Here is what I want: give me a God-listening heart so I can lead your people well, discerning the difference between good and evil. For who on their own is capable of leading your glorious people?”

A God-listening heart resonates with me and what I find myself prayerfully asking that I would have as your pastor. In the midst of what I believe is a shift in our world and in the ways we are being called to be a community of faith today a God-listening heart can help and guide and bless us as we seek to minister together. A God-listening heart would grant us courage to talk and listen to each other about the important questions facing us. A God-listening heart can remind us of God’s abiding and amazing and loving presence. A God-listening heart would give us the strength to be the people God is calling us to be in this time and in this place.

Friends, it is my prayer that we would have a God-listening heart toward one another, toward those who brush up against our lives this week, and in our relationship with the Sacred. It is my prayer that a God-listening heart would give us the courage and the strength and the grace and the hope we need to start to dream dreams and faithfully discerning the direction God is calling us to go in the weeks to come. A God-listening heart that might challenge us to talk about what we might need to hold onto and what we might need to let go of. A God-listening heart that would remind us that we are not alone, that there is so much to celebrate and give thanks for, so much hope and life-giving Spirit that stirs here in our shared life together. A God-listening heart to trust, trust that in the year to come we can discern and discover where we are being beckoned and how we can share the good news of God’s extravagant love with our neighbors, this community, with creation and with all those who call this planet home. What would I wish for? What do I pray for as we round the corner and begin our fourth year of ministry together? A God-listening heart...that sounds just about right.

May it be so for you and for me. Thanks be to God for our life together and for the indescribable joy of being your pastor, your friend, and your companion on the faith journey in this time and in this place. Amen and all the people of God with gusto echoed back, “Amen”