

The first line of the collect for this 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity reads, “Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve....” The sense of this opening, descriptive, clause is that God is eager to give good things, to give blessings, to His children. Collects are idealistic in a sense; there is a whole theology behind them that isn't always immediately obvious, and that doesn't necessarily comport with our expectations. We know, of course, that God doesn't just give us what we want. He is not a vending machine – we don't just say ten prayers and then our requests get delivered on our front doorstep as if from Amazon. He does, however, give us abundantly what we *need* to grow in holiness and peace and, yes, to even grow in happiness, though we usually don't see how we have matured through His blessings until we have the benefit of hindsight. He typically doesn't give us what we want. Rather He gives us what we might not necessarily want, but what we need.

In the readings this morning we can draw out four points that help us to better understand the meaning of today's prayer. The first point is that God is good. We surprisingly forget this sometimes, particularly when God doesn't answer our prayers as we expect. The second point is that God knows us. He knows what we need as human beings in general, but even more than that, He knows each of us personally even better than we know ourselves, and He therefore knows what we really personally need. The third point most directly connects with the collect. As His children, God loves us and therefore wishes to bless us abundantly with those things which will give us growth and wholeness, and refrains from giving us those things that lead us to destruction. Finally, the last point is really more of a question directed at us. Will we faithfully respond to the abundance of God in obedience even if such blessings take us into trials and difficulties?

So let's dig into the readings. First, we affirm that God is good. The readings aren't specifically focused upon this theme, but all scripture presumes this postulate. Today's first

reading is from the Apocrypha – the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus. As a reminder, these books were written between the Old and New Testaments and they are neither acknowledged as Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament, or as written with the apostolic authority of the New Testament, but we do acknowledge their antiquity and read them, “for example of life and instruction of manners” (from Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion). The reading starts by denying the contrary position – it says God is not evil and does not give us what is evil, and neither does He lead us into evil. Beginning at the 11<sup>th</sup> verse of the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter:

Do not say, “Because of the Lord, I left the right way”; for he will not do what he hates.

Do not say, “It was he who led me astray”; for he had no need of a sinful man.

The Lord hates all abominations, and they are not loved by those who fear him.

Again, nothing new here theologically, but the reading simply observes that a good God requires good from His followers. We also see the goodness of God in the healing of the deaf and mute man in the Gospel lesson. These are just a few obvious examples, but of course the entirety of the scriptures affirms the goodness of God. This fact must always be firmly established in our hearts and minds whenever we try to understand why our life experience does not always comport with the surface understanding of biblical principles.

The second point we can highlight today is that God knows us. This is more than a knowing of us as an acquaintance. It is more than knowing us even as our dearest friend. Rather it is an intimate knowledge of every detail of our human experience and a deeper understanding of our own psyche than even we know ourselves. Of course the Psalm which we referenced above beautifully elaborates on this. Allow me to re-read some excerpts:

O LORD, thou hast searched me out, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising; thou understandest my thoughts long before.

Thou art about my path, and about my bed; and art acquainted with all my ways.

For lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, O LORD, knowest it altogether.

...

Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit? or whither shall I go then from thy presence?

If I climb up into heaven, thou art there; if I go down to hell, thou art there also.

If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

...

For my reins are thine; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.

My bones are not hid from thee, though I be made secretly, and fashioned beneath in the earth.

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book were all my members written;

Which day by day were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

This psalm so beautifully expresses the intimacy with which God knows us. He knows our thoughts and intentions, He knows our actions and the motivations behind them, He made us, guiding our bodies from conception, and He knows the ailments that afflict us.

The gospel lesson this morning also reinforces the idea that God— this time God revealed in the person of Jesus—knows us all with complete knowledge. The deaf and mute man was brought to Jesus, and we note here that Jesus “took him aside from the multitude.” Jesus usually didn't do this in His interactions with those He would heal. Of course every situation

was different and every person was different, but Jesus knew what each person individually needed, and thus He addressed their needs differently. This is very far from a one-size-fits-all approach. Jesus treats this man with an intimacy which displays His total regard for this one individual person. You and I likewise have God's full attention in our prayers and in our worship, and when God chooses to act in our behalf, He does so with full attention and complete awareness of our needs.

Not only does God know exactly what we individually need to more fully grow in wisdom and grace, He also knows what all people need. He sees our needs within the context of the needs of the parish, of the local community, and of the world. We may be called to endure various difficulties in our lives not only for our personal growth, but for the health and growth of God's kingdom in ways to which we are blind. The Church is more fully established when God gives us those good, but hard, things which we do not particularly want. But this leads us to the third point.

God desires to *abundantly* provide such good things for us. As the collect states, He is "wont to give us more than we desire or deserve." It is upon this basis that we then petition God to act in accordance with His character. We pray that He would, "Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask." Notice too that in asking for the good things of God, there is an implied submission to what He provides. We do not dictate to God the things with which He must bless us, but we humbly receive what He knows is best for us and for the Church. We often will not understand why He gives us what He does. But St. Paul in the epistle from 2 Corinthians 3 asserts that what God provides is best for it is given in and for, the ministry of the Spirit of life.

We do not provide such gifts for ourselves. Our knowledge is finite, our power is insignificant, our motives are confused. As the Apostle states, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Notice that the gifts we have received as members of the body of Christ is that we have become ministers of the life-giving Spirit of God. The picture provided for us here is that we are a sort of conduit – God pours upon us His abundant grace and then we are to share that grace and love and blessing with the world. That is what a minister does, he ministers what he has been given to others, and you are all here called ministers of the new testament - indirectly meaning the book of the new testament, but more explicitly meaning of the New Covenant made with us through the sacrifice of Christ.

And isn't it interesting that in the gospel lesson, after Jesus connects with the deaf and mute man taking him aside from the crowd, putting his fingers in his ears and spitting and touching his tongue, that Jesus then looks up to heaven. No doubt this look toward His Father in heaven is a prayer that this man might be healed from his deafness and from his inability to speak. Christ in this passage does what we are now also called to do. We also should be seeing the needs of the world, especially of those right in front of us, and then bringing those needs to God in prayer with faith, sincerity, and diligence. The grace of God flowing through Christ healed the deaf and mute man. We, too, are to be means whereby the grace of God flows to the world. He desires us to petition Him so that He can answer as is most expedient for us (as the prayer of St. Chrysostom says).

Finally, however, we should note the response of the, now healed man. Christ charged him and his friends that they should not broadcast what had happened to other people. Why? The general understanding is that this hampered the free movement of Christ and His disciples. As God, Christ brought healing to many many people. But as man, Christ was

limited in His physicality. Because the crowds pressed in upon Him and followed Him everywhere, His ministry to other regions was perhaps not as extensive. And the demands of the crowd that met Him everywhere became greater for there was simply more people in need that came from farther away. The text implies that Christ's ministry was compromised in some manner through the neglect of the command to not publish the healing miracles broadly. This then implicitly interrogates us. Since we have been blessed by God in Christ, will we listen to and obey His commands to us?

Let's take a moment to think about how God has blessed us both here at Christ the King Anglican Church and as individuals. I believe that we have received an abundance of blessings over the last year. Covid has basically gone away (for now!); my wife and I have moved here to minister to this parish and this community; this has been a joy for all of us. We've shed tears together and we've laughed together, we've had recent confirmations and we will be having a baptism. We've also experienced sorrow as a community, and we are still processing that hard loss. In all of these things and more, we've received the abundant blessings of God. We know that He is doing something really great here through us in the Five Cities area.

Now the question remains, will we be ministers to those around us of the Spirit of Life and Light? Will we listen to Christ as He has charged us with the words, "Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;"? He has given us what we have needed and He has given us abundantly more. Let us as a parish, heed the call to ministry. Turn the abundance you have received into abundant love for the world around us. Bring them in to share in the blessings of God. Do not neglect the charge that He has clearly given us.

Our God is good and He is powerful and He is gracious. He knows exactly what we need for our life and health. And He abundantly brings blessings in our pilgrimage as individuals

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and as a parish. Many of us are healed and helped when we pray even though some of us are not. Can we be thankful for it all? Can we humbly received the gifts of God, both those we welcome and those we wish we could avoid? And in the receiving of God's blessings, will we then keep them for ourselves, hoarding the goodness of God, or will we determine to follow Jesus more fully, more faithfully, by obeying and ministering to those around us. I pray that we would diligently do so. And may we, with all confidence, know that God will provide so very abundantly for all of our needs. Yes, God will provide abundantly indeed.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.