

Sermon for Sunday, October 22, 2023

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

“What Do You Want?”

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Decorah, Iowa

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Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

What do you want?

What do you really want?

Do you know?

Can you ask for it from others? From God?

I'm struck that Moses knows what he wants and boldly asks for it. In an intimate conversation with God, Moses pleads with God to go with him and the people, and begs to be shown God's glory. Moses names what he wants.

That's often hard for me to do with other people and with God. Last year, I had a minor medical procedure for a thyroid condition, a procedure I'll need to do every year now. The scheduler told me, "*You don't need a driver for this*", so I just went on my own. But it turned out to be really painful and uncomfortable, and I wished I'd had my husband Matt with me. Thankfully, I knew he'd gladly come, and we scheduled for that this year. But the week of the procedure, our plans to help some extended family kept changing, and we were both ending up with a really full plate. I'll just go to that procedure on my own, I told Matt, I'm fine.

Yet as the week went on, I noticed I was really grumpy about the plans that had changed. I was frustrated with the extended family - why can't they just get it together? I got curious about my anger and realized it wasn't the change in those plans that was bugging me. It was that I wanted Matt at that procedure. He was glad to come, we had a nice day, and even got to enjoy some Indian food together. I went on from there to help our family gladly and peacefully.

I was grateful that I figured out what I wanted ahead of time, so that I could ask for it. Usually that happens after the fact, if at all. What do you want? Can you ask for it? What gets in the way? So many things get in the way of me asking for what I want, especially from God.

- I've been taught to put other people's wants and needs above my own.
- I've learned to distrust my desires - they might lead me to eat too much sugar or binge on too much Netflix.
- Marketing tells me to fulfill my longings by shopping and that just leaves me wanting.
- And honestly, I often wonder if asking God makes any difference. I'm afraid to name what I really long for because I don't want to be disappointed.

What gets in the way for you? It helps me to see how God responds to Moses when Moses asks for what he wants. First some context. Right before our story today, God tells Moses that an angel will now accompany him and the people as they continue to travel through the wilderness. God has been with them but an angel will now take God's place. Moses pleads with **God** to continue to ac-

company him and the people in the wilderness. Moses doesn't want to lead these people without God's presence, and he tells God that. Moses' plea leads God to change plans and to say, "The very thing you have asked I will do." Then, Moses says, "Show me your glory." He makes another big ask. God basically says, *I hear you, but you can't handle seeing my full glory.* I'll give you a glimpse of me and I'll protect you, make sure you aren't overwhelmed.

All this shows us that God is in a real, intimate relationship with us, that God listens to us, that what we want matters to God. And it isn't just Moses who gets to have this kind of conversation with God. Jesus invites us all into it, teaching us that we can call God 'daddy', rest in the bosom of our mothering God, and be at peace sharing our longings with God. Our desires matter to God and they can help join us to God and to God's longings for the world. For instance, yearning for a quiet night opens me to pray for the people of Gaza and Israel living with such fear and pain. Honoring my desire for quiet helps me keep working for a more peaceful world.

In this conversation with God and Moses, we also see how God works even with our harmful desires. Moses thinks he wants to see God's glory but finds he really needs God's protection. This happens to me with sugar. Paying attention to that unhelpful craving can help me to recognize that I'm tired, that what I really need is some rest and some joy. That also connects me to other people because we all need rest and joy. I'm learning to trust that God is present in my desires, that God longs to hear my wants, and that they can open me to the needs of the world.

What do you want? Can you tell God? What will happen if you're disappointed? Moses spoke of his desire to see God's glory and didn't get exactly what he wanted. I wonder if naming that desire before God helped him to let go of it more peacefully when it couldn't happen. Sometimes when we haven't identified what we want we live with a nagging sense of dissatisfaction and disappointment. Things just seem off, but we don't know why. If we can say what we want clearly to God, then if things don't go as we hope we will still feel disappointed, but we'll at least know why. Then we can let go and open to what is next.

What do you want?

Where is God in that longing?

How is that longing connecting you to God's longing for peace and well-being for all?

You can approach your wants with curiosity and gentleness because God is with you, God is holding your life and all your longings.

Later today we'll bring our longings to God in sung prayers.

For now, let's join in a moment of silent prayer and reflection.