

21st Sunday After Pentecost
October 17, 2021
Isaiah 53: 4-12, Psalm 91:9-16,
Mark 10: 35-45

Our Heart's Desire

I am reading *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* by Wayne Muller. Drawing from Christian, Buddhist, and other religious traditions, the author makes a case for the need to have Sabbath time in our lives now more than ever. Along the way, he lays out why this need is often forgotten/ignored or a distant memory for many of us. Our society, fueled by relentless advertising, merchandising, comparisons, and material desires, drives us to do more, accomplish more, and work more. Like hamsters on a wheel, we go, go, go, never reaching the destination of contentment.

There is a section in the book where the author talks about desire and suffering. He writes, "The Buddha taught that desire gives birth to suffering. He said that our thirst or craving for what we desire actually causes us great sorrow. If we are always seeking for what we do not have, he said, we will always be disappointed."

When we do not receive what we want, we can cycle through many different emotions like frustration, anxiety, restlessness, lack of fulfillment, and even anger. We are beset with the "If onlies." If only I had: more money, a better job, a bigger house, a better spouse, then – I would be happy. People I know who do 12 step work refer to this a "chasing happy." It

contentment is always out of reach. Sure, maybe, in the beginning, one can be excited about getting a raise. However, it is not long before the first glow of joy fades into memory, and before we know it, we want again.

When Jesus tells John and James that he cannot grant them their hearts' desire, I imagine that they were greatly disappointed. Their request, driven by a need for recognition and maybe power, reveals that they were not satisfied with following and working with Jesus and their life of service. They wanted the world to know that they were unique, important and that they mattered. John and James wanted to "be somebody."

Theirs was a simpler time. There was no Internet, no television, and no "influencers" on social media filling their heads with how to be successful, compete with the Joneses, be the best disciples ever, or be worthy of exalted status. John and James were humans, subject to the same internal drive for recognition that many of us have. We seek to understand who we are meant to be, who we are, and how we will be remembered.

Jesus' instruction for those who wish to become great is to become a servant. For the glory seeker, this is a challenge. Because a life of service requires that one look beyond the borders of their self-interests. A life of service requires that one look for opportunities to provide and to give with humility. Genuine service is not an ego-driven event.

So what are the benefits of a life lived in service? Ask anyone who regularly feeds the hungry, visits the sick or imprisoned, clothes the naked,

listens to survivors, or spends time with a child for whom no one else seems to care. These servants are likely to tell you that a life of service helps them answer the question, "Why am I here?" They will often say things like, "It felt good to do something for someone else."

Here are some of the benefits I have discovered when I do service: an enduring sense of gratitude for the abundant gifts of grace I receive; an understanding of how compassion for others helps build self-empathy for me; and the knowledge that hope abounds whenever I answer God's call to be of assistance.

Maya Angelou is known to have said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." We may not be able to solve all the ills in the world or make individual problems go away. However, I do not doubt that when we take the time to "be there" for someone else, we are saying "yes" to God, and in doing so, we may well be answering a prayer.

At the Church of the Incarnation, a banner includes a modified part of a poem from St. Teresa of Avila, whose feast day is October 15. The banner reads: Christ has no body but ours. (Forgive me if the quote is not exact).

Let me share the entire poem with you now:

“Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks

Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

When God calls us to be servants, it helps if we can hear God's voice. That still, small voice sometimes struggles to be heard over the never-ending noise and attention-grabbing activities in which we might be engaged. So it is essential to take sabbath time. We need time to rest, reflect, and renew. And when we engage in sabbath time, we can learn what it means to matter, have respect and dignity, be grateful, and love as Christ commanded. Then our heart's desires will indeed be fulfilled.