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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

July 26, 2026

Proper 12, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary

1 Kings 3:5-12

Psalm 119:129-136

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

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I imagine maybe you, like me, spent some time as a kid thinking about what you would do with three wishes. And maybe, like me, you thought: hey, I could hack this system by wishing for more wishes!

I remember talking about this with a friend. You could wish for three more wishes, but then you'd have to keep asking for more pretty often. You could wish for a thousand wishes, but it would be hard to keep track of when you were running out. Then we realized you could just wish that all your wishes would come true. Boom! Problem solved—except not; because what if you made a wish by accident? Like you were using a figure of speech, like in an angry moment you said “I wish my little sister would disappear forever” and forgot it would really happen? And even a lot of the things we might genuinely wish for sometimes might not be good for us. So we tried to put more guardrails on the wish. I think it ended up something like, “I wish that every wish I make will come true, but only *if* it's a wish I really actually wish for, and *if* it's a wish that's actually good.”

We were pretty clever really! It was a wish calculated to assure ourselves of maximum security and success.

Today in our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures we meet Solomon, the son and heir of the great King David. And as a sort of coronation present God offers the young King Solomon a wish. And who could have blamed him for making a wish that would assure him of maximum security and success? A long life. Riches. Military superiority to protect him and his people. Those would be ingredients in a pretty good kingship. And instead Solomon, this young king awed by his responsibility and sensing his inadequacy, asks for wisdom. Which is a wonderful thing to have—but think about what wisdom doesn't necessarily assure you of. You can be plenty wise and still die young, or live poor, or be laughed at or ignored. I'd like to be wise too—but honestly given the choice I'd probably opt for a long life, material contentment, and protection for those I love. Solomon makes the harder choice. And God praises him for it.

But what exactly *is* wisdom? Surely God's wisdom is more than just worldly wisdom. We talk about "conventional wisdom" or "being street wise"—wisdom as ways to get by, as shrewdness. But what's wise in God's eyes isn't necessarily conventional or worldly at all. Today in our gospel Jesus gives us a glimpse of God's wisdom in five tiny little stories. For a few weeks now our gospel readings have featured parables, those little mysterious stories Jesus tells that never seem to have just one clear moral and can always be read in different ways. It's as if this week Jesus is capping off his parable series with a flourish through a closing burst of mini-parables. And they all suggest God's wisdom isn't just good advice on how to live in this world in a way that minimizes risk and maximizes the bottom line.

You think you know wisdom, Jesus says? God's wisdom is a mustard seed: something tiny and invasive that somehow grows into a shelter for birds. It's yeast: a woman's invisible ingredient that makes the whole batch of dough come alive. It's buried treasure. It's a pearl worth the whole world. It's a net that catches the good with the bad and worries about sorting later. It's a wise steward who knows how to hold onto what's good from the old and stay open to what's new and surprising.

In several books from the Old Testament that are traditionally said to have been written by Solomon himself, God's Wisdom is portrayed as a personified figure, always female, a gracious lady holding out blessing to those who live in God's ways. In his parables Jesus too holds onto the great truths from those ancient books, but often puts a twist on them: God's wisdom is something more mysterious and more startling than we might imagine. The early Christians, as they were groping toward ways to describe who Jesus was, sometimes referred to him as the Word of God, but just as often they also called him the Wisdom of God: Lady Wisdom, showing up in tangible form as a human being who lived with total integrity, practiced unconditional love, preached God's truth and justice, was rejected and died and yet couldn't stay dead. God's Wisdom, strange and surprising to the end; a living parable.

I think back to my childhood wish. And it was a good wish, in many ways. It was a groping toward wisdom. But where it maybe fell short was that it tried to create a rule that would work in every circumstance, a set of regulations to function as insurance for having a good life. But God's wisdom shows up not as insurance; not as regulations; not even as magic; but as a Person. Because insurance and regulations aren't the same as a relationship. It takes a Person to love and be loved.

In the end what we need most, what our hearts yearn for, is not insurance, not safety, not even a good life; but God. A God who loves us, who is crazy about us, and who will stop at nothing to win us.

In the epistle reading today Paul says that we don't know how to pray as we ought. Yet that's OK, somehow; because God's own Spirit is already praying in us, doing the work we don't know how to do, asking for what we don't know how to ask. "The Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words," Paul says. So even as I was groping toward my wish, God was already there, asking and answering, the pray-er and the one being prayed to, the Lover and the Beloved.

I wonder what you're wishing for today? I wonder what God's Spirit is praying in you, more deeply than you even know? Whatever you are wishing for; whatever the Spirit is asking in you; Paul promises that nothing can separate us from the One who loves us. Not the fears of a child. Not the losses of a lifetime. Not hardship, not distress, not danger, not even death itself. The wish beneath every wish has been answered. God is here and will never let us go.