

## "DESIRE"

Psalm 20    Matthew 23:37-39    1 Peter 3:8-12

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York Center Church of the Brethren

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Who remembers the Sears catalogue? The best one of the year was, of course, the "Christmas Wish Book." My sisters and I would spend hours studying every page- and arguing over whose turn it was next. Then we would write our lengthy Christmas lists on notebook paper, including page number, item number and name, and if appropriate, quantity and color. I wish I would have saved some of those pages. We didn't expect to get everything on our lists- but we usually got some of our requests. Nowadays kids have the whole internet as their "Wish Book."

The very first Sears Christmas Book catalog was published in 1933. It featured items such as the "Miss Pigtales" doll, an electric (battery powered) toy automobile, a Mickey Mouse watch, fruitcakes, Lionel electric trains, five- pound box of chocolates, and **live singing canaries**.

In 1933, Sears was already a familiar part of America's Christmas tradition. The 1896 Sears general catalog included wax candles for Christmas trees. The 1898 Sears catalog added Christmas cards, and the first Christmas tree ornaments appeared in 1900. Sears began selling Christmas stockings and artificial Christmas trees in 1910. Electric Christmas tree lights made their debut in the catalog two years later. After 1933, the Wish Book name became synonymous with the annual Christmas Book catalog. In 1968, Sears made it official by renaming the Christmas Book catalog The Wish Book.

Many people nostalgically think of the Wish Book as filled with nothing but toys. In fact, over the years, more pages were devoted to gifts for adults. The 87-page 1933 Christmas Book catalog featured 25 pages of toys and 62 pages of gifts for adults. In 1968, the Wish Book totaled 605 pages, with 225 pages devoted to toys and 380 pages to gifts for adults.

The Wish Book tradition continued into the twenty-first century with Wishbook.com, first launched in 1998. In 2009, Sears introduced a new, interactive, online version of everyone's favorite Holiday Wish Book, allowing shoppers to easily turn the virtual pages of the catalog and purchase products instantly from their computer.

I still have a soft spot in my heart for that big old catalogue with the thin and colorful pages. There were so many things I wanted, but probably nothing I needed. It was so exciting to see what all the possibilities were- and it was a bit overwhelming too. There

were and still are so many voices telling us what we **should** want for Christmas (and all year long).

You can't get away from the ads- they are everywhere- on tv, on the radio, on your computer, in magazines, on buses, and billboards. They boldly tell you what you must have in order to have a fulfilling and happy life.

Can I really have a happy marriage without a \$3,000 diamond necklace? Will Marty appreciate his Christmas gifts even if there isn't a new vehicle in the driveway with a ginormous bow on top? Will your children need therapy as adults if they don't find the newest video game under the tree? Will your family and friends abandon you if you don't serve the right kind of designer coffee with Christmas dinner?

That all sounds so ridiculous, doesn't it? (At least I hope it does.) So many voices (that want to take our money) tell us what we **should** desire that sometimes we aren't even sure what it is we really want or need. During this Advent season our guide is a book called NIGHT VISIONS, by poet, artist, and minister Jan Richardson. Our theme for the second Sunday of Advent is "Desire." Desire is a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen. I like the word, "longing" which is similar and yet somehow, for me, is more poignant, more gut-wrenching. It means yearning, craving, pining, hungering.

Jan Richardson captures this theme in a prayer/poem:

*"You meet us in our hungering*

*with manna not of our making,*

*and in our thirsting*

*you surprise us*

*with unexpected wine.*

*You are the source*

*of our desiring*

*and the end*

*of all our longing.*

*O giver of the feast*

*And ever-present guest,*

*Blessed be."*

The Bible is filled with longing, with prayers naming the desires of God's people- for a child, a home, a future, an answer, a community, a glimpse of God. Scripture also voices God's desires. God is longing for the people to be obedient, for the people to care for one another, for the earth to be a place of justice and peace as it was created to be.

Advent is a season of waiting, of longing, of looking ahead for what has not yet happened. What speaks to us this Advent season? What calls to us?

- What dreams have we buried?
- What wounds cry out for healing?
- What longs to be born in you this season?
- What is the yearning, the longing which you have not dared to name?

Our desires reveal to us what we think about God, about ourselves, and about

In her Advent devotional, Kate Bowler writes, *"Longing is the experience of feeling the lack, the recognition, that things are not as they should be. This is the feeling of Advent.*

*During Advent, Christians prepare for the great celebration of Jesus's birth at Christmas. And we do it through the practice of waiting, the practice of extended hope. We are waiting for a world where righteousness is at home. And it isn't. Not even close. We know that here and now, things are not the way they are supposed to be. And in the midst of this uncertainty, we trudge into the season of Advent.*

*In Advent, we are surrounded by the awareness that this posture of waiting- of longing- is our ever-present reality. Waiting and longing for hope, love, joy, and peace. For all those beautiful and elusive things that we can sometimes taste- reminding us that God is good- but that have not come to completion."*

Our text from Matthew's Gospel is one of the most heartbreaking in the Bible. It shows us that even Jesus didn't always get what he wanted. He stands in the holy city of Jerusalem, just days away from death, and he weeps.

*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"*

God as mother is such a rich and vivid metaphor. We can imagine a mother hen spreading out her great wings and providing warmth from her own body and providing safety, and care for her helpless little chicks. The world is a dangerous place and no chick in their right mind would refuse such an offer. But Jesus laments that God's people have done just that. They have turned away from Jesus, away from the God who offers sanctuary and peace. It is hard to imagine that someone would do that, and yet, they did, and we still do.

The letters of the Apostle Paul and others in the New Testament are filled with desire, longing. The writers desire for the Christians in the young church to be strong in their faith, to look out for each other, to have hope, and to welcome those who are sent to teach them.

In the first letter of Peter, the people are reminded that those who desire life are called to live in a certain way- in a way that produces love, compassion, humility, and sympathy. They are warned to turn away from gossip and revenge. Those who want to be in a right relationship with God must be in right relationship with one another. Peter tells them, "your behavior matters." We, in the faith community, are responsible to one another. Our longings and desires impact others in ways we may never know.

Our Advent hope isn't just for us, it is not a personal, private matter- it is a gift for the whole world, the whole creation. As we page through that Wish Book that promises all of our heart's desires- which of them will draw us closer to God? To one another? To our own true and holy selves?

Which of the many things we think we need or want will open our hearts to realize that God longs for us too?

St. Augustine captured our deepest longing and, I think, God's too, when he wrote, "*You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.*"

Ultimately, what we long for, I think, is the reign of God to be made real among us. We make that request every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

The late Frederick Buechner described the Kingdom or Reign of God as only he could. "*If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the Reign of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to be born both within ourselves and within the world, we would know that the*

*Reign of God is what all of us hunger for above all other things even when we don't know its name or realize that it's what we're starving to death for.*

*The Reign of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. We glimpse it at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis, a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength. The Reign of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it." \*\**

So what do we do, my friends? What do we do with this homesickness? With this longing? With this desire for the Reign and presence of God in our world and in our lives? We are doing it- we gather together for worship and we name the desires of our hearts. We give voice to our longing and we uphold one another in our waiting.

We are doing it when we gather for fellowship for as we eat and talk together we see a glimpse of the table God prepares for us; a place of welcome and acceptance; a place of inclusion and freedom to be who we are; a place of abundance and generosity; a table with a place for everyone.

In the coming week, I invite you to be aware of the desires of your heart. What are you longing for this Advent season? Where might you find it? May these words from Kate Bowler help lead your way. First, familiar words you sang a little while ago.

*"Come, thou long expected Jesus*

*Born to set thy people free*

*From our fears and sins release let us find our rest in thee.*

*Israel's strength and consolation*

*Hope of all the earth thou art*

*Dear desire of every nation*

*Joy of every longing heart."*

*O God, as if it couldn't be possible, these are still darkening days for our struggling earth, for our countries and their leaders, for our families and friends, and for ourselves.*

*Blessed are we with eyes open to see the world as it really is, who say: Where are you God? And where are your people?*

*Where are the smart and sensible ones who fight for good and have the power to make it stick?*

*Oh God, help us in our fear and confusion, amid so much uncertainty. Shine your light upon us. God have mercy. Christ have mercy. Spirit have mercy.*

*Though now it is a place of hidden hope, we know that you are the anchor dropped into the future- our future. Come, Lord Jesus. Shine on our darkness and show us the way.*

*God, we don't yet have hold of it, but we can almost feel it- or at least the memory of it- the joy that our hearts so long for, the fulfilling of all our hopes, the completion of our loves, the perfection of beauty brought near.*

*Blessed are we who lift our eyes and recognize even from afar that it is you.*

*It was you all along."*

Amen.