

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church

Pinole, CA

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

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“Choosing Between Me and We”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Inspired by Rev. (Fr.) Michael Marsh

Good Morning everyone, great to be here after a busy week. Today I share with you some insights, not about today’s Gospel, but instead about King Solomon’s choice because I think this is very relevant right now.

King Solomon in today’s reading asks us the question, do I pray for *me*, or do I pray for *we*. Imagine the Lord coming to you and giving you a blank check. God says, “Ask what I should give to you.” Well, it sounds a little like a genie in a bottle kind of reading, but God is asking Solomon to fill in the blank, here is the check, what amount would you like? And who would not take advantage of that?

Who hasn’t at one time or another wished for that? We’ve probably all played the if-you-could-have-anything-in-the-world game. And history has proven having riches or power doesn’t mean happiness or joy. But this open, anything goes question is not that simple. It’s not a game. It’s real life and real death. God’s question comes with a dilemma and Solomon’s answer will carry profound consequences. Solomon must decide between asking for himself or asking for the larger *we*, of which he is also a part. If *we* gains, so does *me*.

That this question comes to him in the night, in a dream, suggests it comes from a deep interior place, and that his answer will also come from that deep interior place. We are often blind to, and unaware of, the choice between *me* and *we* as we face the circumstances of our life and world. We tend to focus on what is happening around us rather than what is happening within us. With that said, we often don’t realize the power that we do hold, and that we do have the opportunity and the right to choose *I* or *we*. Both have consequences.

How many times have you not picked up a piece of trash – even if you didn’t make the trash? And the voice in your head tells you someone else will do it. How many

times did you? If you did why? Was that coming from your heart? Were you thinking about the greater we? Chances are you were.

When disruptions occur, of whatever sort, something that throws our life off balance, something that challenges, troubles, or frightens us, we almost immediately begin thinking about a response, and the response usually starts with *me*. And we are now living in unprecedented times so these questions are no longer rhetorical but are now our reality.

What will we do? Wear the mask? Help the community? Stand for justice and racial equality? How will we do it? Will I donate money? Stand on a protest line? Pledge to the church and gift my time and treasure? In some ways those are really secondary questions. Important questions, but let's get to the heart of the matter.

The primary question is the awareness of others and the interior condition from which we will respond. That's certainly how Jesus lived and what he taught. His was not a *me, me, me* life or teaching. So what about us? Is our awareness and response limited to *me* or is it a *we* awareness and response?

I am not just talking about whether or not you wear a mask, which is definitely a *we* or *me* decision. I am not talking about what time you go shopping, or how you feel about the news on any given day. I am talking about something bigger and much more important. Your inner spiritual life. Is your inner spiritual life being nurtured for your own good, or to include the *we* around you? Are you improving yourself so you can help others?

As clearly demonstrated in today's world, the *me, me, me* train of thought seems to be a very destructive frame of mind. It's not, however, just global or political issues. The choice between *me* and *we* exists in marriages and families and between friends. It was at the center of this country's most recent failed response to the pandemic and cause of today's economic collapse. It's a part of prejudice and discrimination as well as the hardened moral positions we so often take against one another. Look for conflict and chances are you will see a *me* life to the exclusion of a *we* life.

I'm not suggesting that a *we* attitude fixes every conflict, ends every war, or settles every debate. It won't. It's not that simple. It does, however, change the way we approach each other in the midst of those conflicts, wars, and debates. It affects how we do our daily business as this virus spreads, how we treat others who are different from us. To be welcoming, but also safe.

To think in terms of *we* opens our minds, hearts, and wills to consider more than just ourselves. It offers new possibilities and creates options. It brings about an awareness of and concern for all, including ourselves.

That shift from *me* to *we* is not easy. It means we must let go of the past patterns that no longer work, suspend judgments, and redirect our attention to a future that wants to emerge in and through us. That emerging future is the kingdom of heaven. This is what Jesus says is worth selling everything for. The kingdom of heaven. The shift from *me* to *we* happens within us before it ever happens outside and around us, hence Solomon's dream.

So what does that shift look like? What does a *we* life look like? In a person, it looks a lot like Jesus. Rev. Michael Marsh from Texas puts forth some considerations.

- A *me* life is one of power, domination, and control. A *we* life is one of vulnerability, intimacy, and self-giving.
- A *me* life is characterized by rhetoric, frenzied reaction, and isolation. A *we* life is characterized by silence, stillness, and presence.
- A *me* life is filled with doubt, cynicism, and fear. A *we* life is filled with faith, hope, and love.
- A *me* life clings tightly to the past. A *we* life embodies what might be.
- A *me* life draws lines that divide. A *we* life draws circles that encompass.

Solomon chose a *we* attitude. He asked for a listening heart, a heart with ears, a heart that would hear the pain of the world, the needs of the people, search for justice and hear the voice of God.

That it was a dream doesn't mean it wasn't real and it doesn't mean Solomon's waking was the end of the dream. To the contrary, his awaking was the beginning of a new reality. He awoke to a new possibility, for himself and for the people. That reality and possibility would be realized every time Solomon choose *we* over *me*, every time he lived into the dream.

I know you must all feel like I do about the changes that we have been asked to do since this virus came to be. I miss you, I miss our *we*, I miss church. But I want you to know, your church is hard at work. We are exploring ways to be church into the larger *we*. Don't forget to support each other, and our ministries.

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And it is our work in the world to serve the greater *we* and get this Good News out.
Amen