

The Hope to Which God has Called You
A Sermon on Ephesians 1:11-23 by the Rev. Philip Major
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In the letter to the Ephesians, one of Paul's disciples encourages the people of Ephesus with these words: *I pray that God ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation...so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you.*

This is God's desire for us; that we would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation. This is God's desire for us; that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened. This is God's desire for us; that each one of us may know the hope to which God is calling us.

We are on a journey with the one who created us for the purposes of love. But as I said a few weeks ago, God moves in a mysterious way. Sometimes we feel lost, or discouraged, or as if we are alone. So we turn to the saints in our lives for wisdom and encouragement.

The saints of our lives are a diverse group of people. Some are younger than us. Others died many years ago. Some are known by many people. Others are unknown, or perhaps unremembered, by anyone except us.

There is one thing these people have in common. Their examples and words and love bring wisdom, hope, and enlightenment to our lives. Their words and actions, and their presence in our lives are somehow sacred for us, because they are doing the work described in Ephesians.

The people who function as saints in our lives bring enlightenment to the eyes of our hearts. What does this phrase mean for you? They bring enlightenment to the eyes of our hearts. For me it means making a connection between the deep concern of my heart and the deep needs of the world.

The saints are people who pay attention to what is really happening in our lives. The saints also pay attention to the deep needs of the world. The saints help us make a connection between the deep concerns of our hearts and the deep needs of the world. In this way, in the words of Ephesians, they help us come to the place where the eyes of our hearts are enlightened.

The author of Ephesians says, *I pray that God ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation.* The people who function as saints in our lives bring a spirit of wisdom and revelation to our lives. Wisdom and revelation are two different aspects of knowledge or truth. They work together.

I heard someone use the analogy of a fireplace with a fire burning inside of it. The fireplace is empty and loses its purpose when people stop building fires in it. The fire is powerful and beautiful but can be dangerous if it is burning in the middle of your living room. The fire and the fireplace need each other.

The same is true for wisdom and revelation. Wisdom is a type of truth. Wisdom is a combination of experience and knowledge of the realities and facts of life. Wisdom is the ability to make good judgments based on this combination of experience and knowledge.

Revelation is a different type of truth. Revelation is learning an unexpected truth. The fact that the revelation is unexpected does not mean that it is part of a conspiracy or something that could never be explained or proved. Revelation is simply a view of the truth that has not been seen before.

Take one common example. There was a professional violin player. She spent most of the first thirty years of her life practicing and playing her violin. She was so busy playing her violin that she never had much time for some normal activities of life, such as cooking food for herself. At the age of thirty an old friend gave her a cookbook, *The Joy of Cooking*. She decided, for her first recipe, she would make a chocolate cake from scratch. She followed the directions carefully. To her surprise, her

homemade chocolate cake tasted better than the cake she was served in a restaurant. The violinist had spent thirty years paying attention to details, to the details of the music. It was a revelation to her that she was very capable of using this power of attention to details to make a delicious dessert.

We need both of these kinds of truth. We need wisdom and revelation. The people who function as saints bring a spirit of wisdom and revelation to our lives. They help us see new, unexpected truths. They help us see these revelations within a broader frame of wisdom. The saints help us know and speak the truth.

The author of Ephesians says one of the goals of our lives is that *we may know what is the hope to which God has called us*. God's desire is for us to know the hope to which God has called us. God desires you to know the specific hope, the specific path or direction or vocation, to which God is calling you. God desires for you to know how you might best use the gifts God has given you in order to engage in the world in a way that brings more love and goodness.

What is the hope to which God is calling you? What ways is God calling you to use the generous gifts you have been given?

The answer to this question changes and it stays the same. The young woman who discovered she was very good at baking chocolate cakes might come to decide at the age of forty that it is time for her to stop playing the violin many hours every day in order to open her own bakery. The woman brought love and goodness to the world as a violin player, and she brought love and goodness to the world by making beautiful, delicious cakes. Something changed and many things stayed the same.

You are on a similar journey in life. You are seeking to discover and grow in the hope to which God is calling you. The saints in your life are people who help you discover and grow in the specific hope to which God is calling you.

Our relationships with these saints are sacred. God gives us these people, to be in relationships of trust and love. Through their words and actions, we learn and know more of the truth of our lives. Through them, we receive *a spirit of wisdom and revelation*. Through their words and actions, *the eyes of our hearts are enlightened*. Through their love and guidance, we come to see *the hope to which God has called us*.