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## *Joy and Wonder*

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**The Very Reverend Sam G. Candler**  
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**Homecoming Sunday**

About three months ago, if you were to ask a family what they wanted most, they would say, "a vacation!" "It's time to take a break, get away from routine, travel somewhere!" How curious it is, year after year, that those same people -us!" are just as ready to return. Ask many mothers these days what they want the most and they say, "We can't wait for school to start to get our children back to some sort of routine!"

At the end of summer each year, I tend to think of one of my forlorn cousins, a man from a large family, a good and prosperous family. As a youngster, and as a young man, he looked forward to time with family. But as he grew older, he would say to me, "Do you know the two words which are the biggest oxymoron in the world, the biggest self-contradiction in the world? They are the words, "family vacation."

Today, the Cathedral of St. Philip celebrates "Homecoming Sunday." Today is our way of recognizing a certain rhythm in our annual schedules. Whether we have traveled this summer or not, many of us have taken some sort of break. Programs and rehearsals and classes have taken the summer off. But, after a break, we are eager for them to return. We look forward to resuming routines, we are eager to see old friends. We miss each other! And, of course, many of our children and youth are returning to school.

Today, I ask each of us, no matter what age we are. "What do you want the most right now?" It is the same question we could have asked three months ago and received the answer as "vacation." (I am sure that some of us still want a vacation!)

As we resume routines, as we settle back into classes and carpools and schedules, pennant races in baseball and the beginning of football, what do you want the most? Actually, this is a question worth asking at any transition of our lives. When things are changing, when someone has a new job, for instance, or a new school, when someone is ill, or when we are facing the sadness of someone having died, when we have moved to a new house, or when we have taken a new job, when we are in love with someone special again, maybe when we are presenting a child for baptism, whenever we are in a transition, the question is worth asking: "What do you want the most?"

Long ago, King Solomon was apparently given this question, at a moment of critical transition. The great King David had died, David, who had united the tribes and families of Israel. His charisma and leadership were so strong that it was certain

a new messiah would be born of his lineage. But who would succeed him immediately? Who could be the new king?

It would be Solomon, about whom we heard in our Old Testament reading today. (Actually, the transfer of allegiance to Solomon was not as easy as we might think, but we can leave that story to another day.)

The First Book of Kings tells us that Solomon traveled to the holy place of Gibeon one day. And there, he had a dream. In Solomon's dream, the LORD appeared with one statement. "Ask what I should give you," the LORD said. That's the question, isn't it? If we could ask of God anything, anything in the world, what would it be? What is it that you want most?

If the LORD asked us that right now, what would our answer be? What is it that you want the most? Good grades in school? Good grades for your children in school? Less worry in the household? Less worry in the workplace? More money? (That is probably on everyone's list these days!) Better health and a long life? What is it that you want the most?

Solomon did not ask for riches. Solomon did not ask for a healthy, long life. Solomon did not ask for vengeance upon his enemies. And the LORD noticed what Solomon did not ask for. Solomon did ask for wisdom, an understanding mind to govern, the ability to discern good and evil. The LORD was honored in that request, and he told Solomon, "Because you did not ask for long life or riches, I will give you also those things for which you have not asked." In other words, ask for wisdom, and these other things are yours as well.

That pattern is repeated in the words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus noticed so much worry and anxiety about what people were going to eat or wear. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these other things will be added to you as well" (Matthew 6.33). One of the most important principles in the community of God is that when we order our lives rightly, all sorts of other good consequences follow. It is our God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

Here is what I want the most right now. On this day when we celebrate Homecoming Sunday, when we baptize new Christians, when we see a great Ministry Fair, when we return this afternoon for Barbecue and Bingo, here is what I want; I want joy and wonder.

In fact, I am going to pray for those things in a few minutes. After we baptize these children, the celebrant will all pray one of the most glorious prayers in the Prayer Book, for the newly baptized: "Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works." The gift of joy and wonder!

I want joy and wonder not just for these children; I want joy and wonder for all of us! Joy and wonder go a long, long way these days. Do you remember some moment this past summer when time seemed to stop? Maybe you were at the beach or in the mountains. Or maybe you were at home in Atlanta, or in church, without a care at all. Maybe you were with good friends, or you had a special moment with family when no one was upset. You noticed a certain grace in those around you, and even in yourself. Time stopped. That is joy and wonder.

Often, we think we need to go on vacation to receive joy and wonder. Getting away from tired routines and anxious schedules sometimes shows us joy and wonder. But joy and wonder are at their best when they occur in our regular routines and in our ordinary days.

Joy and wonder are about pausing, taking time, to revel in God's grace and glory, even doing ordinary routines! There, we discover that joy and wonder are not about what we have, but about what we give away. Joy and wonder are not about what we take in, but about what we exude.

And the gift of joy and wonder actually releases other gifts - just as Solomon's request for wisdom opened the way for long

life and honor, too. Joy and wonder release other gifts. In fact, joy and wonder do release wisdom. Have you ever noticed how so many smart people act rather stupidly? It is often because they are in bondage to something, entangled in something stifling, something mean and angry, that keeps them from joy and wonder.

And joy and wonder are the key ingredients to our children's education this year, whether that education is here at the Cathedral or in school. Joy and wonder will make scientists who love creation and life. Joy and wonder will make mathematicians who marvel with numbers. Joy and wonder will make writers who work with words. Joy and wonder will make doctors and nurses who love healing. Joy and wonder will make business leaders who turn resources into value. Joy and wonder will make priests and vestry members and teachers in the church. Joy and wonder will produce confident children and patient parents. Joy and wonder release all those gifts.

Joy and wonder are what the kingdom of God -the Community of God!""is all about. Joy and wonder are what this Cathedral is all about. Seek first that community of God, seek first the joy and wonder of God; and all other things will be added to you as well.

AMEN.

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