

Not exactly Aladdin's Lamp

*Truly, truly I say unto you, whatsoever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you.
John 16:23*

You may have seen Aladdin, the animated version. If you have children, you may have seen it, dozens of times. But have you ever read the story? I set out to do just that. As in most cases, one expects the literary edition to be fuller, with a more detailed a plot line and ultimately much more interesting. I was not disappointed. In the literary edition, Aladdin's mother is an important character in the story.

Although she is a Muslim, she warns her son against conjuring up the genies from the ring and then from the lamp. You see, there are also two genies, not just one. "They are demons" she warns him. But her initial insights are set aside as she also becomes enthralled by the lamp and its seemingly infinitely powerful occupant. In fact, she is the one who first rubs the lamp and brings forth the much more powerful genie number 2 into their lives. She ought to have stuck to her initial inclinations.

The demands on the Genie for material things grew exponentially throughout the many pages of our tale. Each new thing brought with it some need for more. Aladdin's initial requests were restrained until he saw the princess, who being a princess, demanded more and more of Aladdin, and the works of His Genie. Wealth brought with it envy and with envy came enemies into their lives. With enemies brought the increasing need for more and more powerful things. It was a tale made interesting to hear, but wearisome to live.

At the end of the story, the reader Aladdin and his princess appeared most privileged. But it's privilege only from a worldly standard. What we learn from the story is that while the genie certainly brought joys they were joys interrupted by evil in the world. In those concluding words of the story, we learn that the princess' father the Sultan died, as all flesh must die. We don't have a "They lived happily ever". Perhaps that stock phrase hadn't been invented yet. Instead our story ends with the realities of mortal life being acknowledged as "They reigned together many years, and left an illustrious and numerous posterity". Their riches could not save. The Genie, even the more powerful Genie number 2 could not work certain powers.

Robin Williams, the voice for the Genie in the animated version speaks forth the limitations that we can only infer from the literary version. "I can't raise the dead". "I can't make someone love you".

We come our Gospel reading today with our Lord's promise "Truly, truly I say unto you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give it to you." with the temptation to interpret in the light of Aladdin and the wonderful lamp. But let us take note not to heed the wrong sort of Spirit, lest we be disillusioned when what we are tempted to expect, yes even demand doesn't happen. Our Lord has a statute of limitations also. Our Lord says, "Whatever you ask for ***in my name***".

Now this limitation is for our own good. As the apostle Paul acknowledges, in our own right we do not know what to pray for. I think of Romans 8:26: "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered".

When left to our own desires, those desires prevent us from experiencing the kind of peace our Lord can offer. Left to their own devices, Aladdin and his princess could never seem to wish for the thing that could bring any lasting peace or satisfaction. Think of the endless pursuit for peace that Aladdin and his beloved princess never experienced. Theirs, we must all agree was always a joy interrupted and interrupted for some time with great trials and suffering. But concerning the joy of the Lord Jesus says, "no man taketh (it) from you". When the Holy Spirit is asking for that which we need in the name of Jesus Christ we have that peace. It is everlasting. Unlike Robin Williams Genie, raising the dead isn't one of His limitations. Neither is having the whole company of heaven love you in a pure and holy love in the fellowship of the God of love beyond his power. For we are restored to the "Image of God".

It is a peace for the here and now and even for everlasting life. Such things couldn't even be conceived of by Aladdin's genies. Though powerful, their power could never rival the power of the King of kings. For we know that he is "the resurrection and the life". He takes us to something beyond the best that this world has to offer. He takes us to a place which we couldn't even wish for, so beyond our expectations and ability to conceive. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard of the glories that await those who love him" declares the Lord's apostle. Indeed. Better to ask in the Lord's name. Indeed, better to let our requests be tempered by the name of the Lord.

The Father withholds those requests inconsistent with the name and nature of our Lord and through the Spirit, helps us ask for the true food of our souls. Do you desire greatness? Then find greatness in servant-hood as Jesus taught. And when you do you find yourself an heir and coheir with Christ Jesus. Do you desire riches? Do not ask for those things which perish here below but rather raise the bar to eternal riches that neither rust nor moth can destroy? And when you do, you'll find yourself dwelling in the New Jerusalem walking on gold and basking in the reflected light of so many precious gems. Do you desire carnal love? Seek that higher love such as the love of Christ for His bride the Church? And when you do you'll experience something beyond the fleeting flesh which more than compensates. When we ask in the spirit of Christ according to His will it is true then "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you".

And in the grace that our Lord promises without reservation "we shall be satisfied". Do you disparage such gifts? Some say, "It's just spiritual stuff, ethereal stuff, and incomprehensible stuff". But I assure you that it is real, and can bring real joy and real meaning and a real home.

Aladdin and the magical lamp are but fiction flickering only in the imagination of men. The story is set as the author says, "in the capital of one of the richest and most extensive kingdoms

of China, the name of which does not at this moment occur..." but the Light of Christ came in the days of Caesar Augustus with His Truth spoken under Pontius Pilate and His glorious resurrection under the watch of witnesses Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, James and John and 500 brethren at the same time. The little while spoken of by Jesus, recorded in John 16, became the fulfilled promises in His life, death, resurrection and ascension in human time. The Communion of saints bore and bear witness even until today at Our Saviour Lutheran Church.

And from such a verified act, testified by both the Holy Spirit and the flesh of man, the gift of faith comes enabling us to ask our Heavenly Father for what is best for us which he grants with joys unspeakable and full of glory. We have something which is real to believe in. Jesus concludes chapter 16 asking "Do you now believe?"

Should we waver as the disciples did, he leaves with one more prophecy (John 16:32). "Behold, the hour comes when you will be scattered, every man to his own, and they shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me".

Indeed, surely it is true. It all played out in the chapters which follow the sixteenth. At his arrest they were scattered. At His trial He spoke Truth. At His crucifixion Jesus speaks to the Father continually concluding "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit". Such repose, witnessed by all touched even the heart of a centurion so he might testify for all to hear "Truly, this man was the Son of God".

Indeed, the Lord's claim in John 16:28 comes true. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world and go to the Father". With His Ascension to the Father our Lord sends the Paraclete, the comforter, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. He comes in full measure. He comes and brings joys unspeakable as Peter preaches on Pentecost. Acts 1:28. "You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy with Your Presence". Such perpetual joy is ours.

In days of persecution and terror for anyone uttering the name of Jesus Christ that was a promise! Yet it was a promise fulfilled and witnessed by the world. Christians lived and suffered with a different view of time – Christian time where our Lord's Second Coming was "soon". The paraclete came and brought the gift of perseverance. Still it was not perseverance as mere survival but one with overflowing joys. He came guiding our requests so they would be wholesome to God, surely granted as he promised giving us true joys.

May we take heed to worship in the coming weeks our Lord's Ascension on Thursday. The Promise of His Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The revelation of His name at Trinity. To know the fullness of the name is to know the secret to our Lord's promise "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you". May this secret be revealed to all, even if it's not exactly like Aladdin's lamp.

Amen.