Desire is perhaps the sweetest of all the emotions. Our emotions range from anxiety to contentment, from apathy to zeal, from fear to courage, from sorrow to joy. But, of all the emotions, desire is just the sweetest: longing enmeshed in hope. Life is ever changing. Our careers may take an abrupt turn or lead us in an unexpected direction. We learn about a need in our community and our volunteer activities shift. A friend introduces us to something new in sports or arts or culture and our social priorities realign. Relationships have their ups and downs. Emotions ebb and flow. But, there is a constant in our life: God. A desire for God, longing enmeshed in hope, is ours to experience. It will shape our life and it is sweet.

Our Gospel lesson today shows us desire for God. Jesus takes Peter and John and James with him up the mountain to pray. And, suddenly, Moses and Elijah, two of the great prophets are standing there with Jesus. Elijah lived 800 years prior. Moses lived 1200 years prior. Imagine standing there with Jesus who is bathed in light, and then these two guys, these two great prophets from long, long ago show up. Would we freeze, stunned into silence? Would we back away slowly and then turn and run? Not these disciples. Peter reaches out to Jesus and Moses and Elijah. He wants them to stay. He wants to be with them always. And, as soon as Peter offers to make three dwellings, what happens? God says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” Peter makes the offer and what happens? God’s voice is heard. Peter desires God and so, his heart is open. He recognizes the prophets. He hears God.

One of the keynote speakers at the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes Conference this year was the Rev. Dr. Sam Wells. Rev. Wells is an Anglican priest. He serves
at St. Martin-in-the-Fields in central London. In his keynote address, Rev. Wells reminded us of our ability, when we live with open hearts, to weave circumstances into a larger story. He told the story of a parishioner who had lost his job at the shipyard. His wife went from a part-time to a full-time position to make ends meet and she needed some help from her husband to care for the children and their home. That wasn’t going well; her husband wasn’t adept at taking care of the home. She had one complaint after another and her frustration reached a peak when he put a ladder through the wall. She let loose criticizing him; she told him he was useless. And, in that moment, their child standing nearby and listening to the entire conversation, said, “He is a good Dad.” Weaving circumstances into a larger story was a way forward for this family.

Wells told another story, this one about his parish, St. Martin-in-the-Fields. During World War I, men leaving for the war would leave from a train station near the parish. Often, with the trains departing early in the morning, the men would arrive the evening before and then need a place to sleep. The parishioners recognized that these men would be sleeping out in the cold on the train platform, so they invited them to sleep in the church. Wells explained, delicately, that some of these men brought in guests to sleep with them the night before they were off to fight in the war. You can see how this would be a bit of a problem for a church. But, the parish decided to let it be. And, today, St. Martin-in-the-Fields houses one of the largest homeless shelters in the city. Every year, they help over 4,000 homeless people, providing immediate relief and long-term support leading to housing, work and independence. When we desire God, we open our hearts and are inspired. In essence, we are hearing God. We see how to weave the circumstances into a larger story of loving relationship with one another.

Do you ever find yourself asking, “How, in this day and age, can this possibly still be happening, can this blindness still persist?” I am fully invested in the CEEP organization, the
Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes. This year, eight of us from St. Paul’s attended the annual conference. Every year, we are inspired by keynote speakers, we learn about new initiatives and creative programming, and we develop a network of colleagues to call on throughout the year for insight and advice. But, I have to admit it was a punch in the gut this year when I walked into a session on excellence in preaching and the entire panel leading the session were men. When a segment of the population is made to feel inadequate or of less value, we are all hurt because we are not living fully into who we are meant to be as a people living together in this world, created to be whole in our diversity. With a Church body this week prohibiting same-sex marriage and banning gay and lesbian clergy, our souls are charred. With the number of hate groups doubling over the past two decades and reaching a high in 2018, we have to let Paul’s plea in his first letter to the Corinthians (12:26) grab hold of our hearts and minds: “If one member suffers, all suffer together.”

Every circumstance can be woven into a larger story. We are all children of God. Our larger story is the Kingdom of God. So, let us fling open our hearts. Let us allow ourselves to feel the pain of injustice and know that we can create the larger story. We persevere in God’s love. We desire God, longing enmeshed in hope. Desire for God is sweet for good reason. It is the gateway to abundance. Amen.