

Cracked Pots in God's service  
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St. Aidan's Episcopal Church  
Jan. 16, 2016  
1 Corinthians 12

I would like to begin this morning with a quote from Richard Rohr's reflections this past week.

Let me state it clearly: a central breakthrough in the biblical revelation is that *God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, and can even be revealed through the sinful and the evil.* This is quite different than you might assume, that God is only offering us the pure, the spiritual, the right idea, or the ideal anything. This is why Jesus stands religion on its head!<sup>1</sup>

Making the ordinary extraordinary. God and Jesus do this on a regular basis. Last week water became something more than just something to wash in but the source of a new life. In our Eucharist, simple bread and wine become the very presence of Christ among us. This week water is changed into wine in a sign of the power of Jesus in the very first sign of his ministry in the Gospel of John.

We are ordinary but by the power of the Spirit in our baptism and our lives we become something extraordinary. We are changed by being Christians, by living into what our baptism service means.

The problem is that most of us do not believe this. If you have spent your life in church you may have had original sin and our sinful nature beaten into your head. We hear the words of the prayer of humble access and only hear the I am not worthy part and forget that this prayer is filled with God's Grace, which is what in fact makes us worthy.

I said a couple weeks ago that the problem is that we tend to equate this concept of being unworthy with being worthless and that is not how God created us. In another passage this week by Fr. Richard Rohr he says:

*We are created in the image of God, we come forth from God, and we will return to God. We each uniquely reflect part of the mystery of God in between! We must find out what part of the mystery is*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?ca=dd5d8cc7-881f-41a0-960a-7f7ceaea5b99&c=1ace9ef0-eeef-11e3-91aa-782bcb740129&ch=1b9941f0-eeef-11e3-91b3-782bcb740129>

*ours to reflect. All I can give back to God is what God has uniquely given to me--nothing more and nothing less.* <sup>2</sup>

Think about this for a moment. Each of us uniquely reflects part of the mystery of God. Each of us is tasked as we grow spiritually to discover our part in that mystery. This is what our passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians is about.

Paul is tackling the issue of gifts of the Spirit. These are all gifts that God gives us that help in our ministry. However, many unfortunately restrict the list to just these gifts that people associate with church. All the gifts, the skills we have are gifts from God that we are called to use. Discovering and using these gifts is how we discover our unique part in the mystery

I have been preparing for vestry retreat that is next weekend. We will spend some significant time with today's passage and the passage for next week. We will be looking at the gifts that each vestry member has and that this parish collectively has to offer.

A common issue I run into is that people do not really believe they have these gifts, may not recognize them or that their gifts are inferior to those of others. There is not a single person sitting in this nave right now for which that thought is true. Here is an ancient Indian story that makes the point<sup>3</sup>.

A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on opposite ends of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water in his master's house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's

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<sup>2</sup> <http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?ca=442aabb7-b784-4c32-98f1-b813a2ef80e6&c=1ace9ef0-eeef-11e3-91aa-782bcb740129&ch=1b9941f0-eeef-11e3-91b3-782bcb740129>

<sup>3</sup> This is not an original story, but one that is quite old. I do not recall the source.

house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

In reality we are all "cracked pots." This is part of what it means to be human. None of us is perfect, but all of us are loved by God. All of us have gifts that are given to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the problem is we find ourselves in ministries that may not suit our gifts and that is when people burn out and disappear.

Think of the difference if you involve yourself in a ministry that you love rather than because it needs to be done. If we are to fulfill the vision of this parish we will need a dedicated group of members who are using the gifts that they have in a way that will build up the body of our church. And the work will be works of joy not a chore. I for one am very grateful for the wonderful work of our Stewardship and Finance Committee. That is most definitely not one of my gifts but we have people who are gifted in dealing with a spreadsheet. Now to me that's a real gift of the Spirit that has most definitely passed over me.

The sum total of our gifts and how we share them is what makes any congregation the unique place that it is. This use of gifts is what makes St. Aidan's a unique parish. As we move forward in this new year we enter into a time in which we continue to seek to discern where God is calling us. This like prayer is an ongoing conversation with God.

This morning's SSJE message is a fitting conclusion  
How is Jesus calling you to love (serve)? It's most likely through something broken, something in need of God's life, light, love and provision. Certainly it is more than you can handle on your own. Jesus' good news is that you don't have

to. God the Father's love will see us through to healing if we will just say "yes" to Jesus' invitation.