

We all have gifts

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Last week as we heard the account of Jesus' baptism I spoke about our baptism as a claiming of our belovedness. So after we do that, what's next? This week we have two messages one in our gospel and one in Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth. I want to touch on the first for just a moment and then concentrate on the second.

The wedding in Cana is the first of the signs that Jesus does in the Gospel of John. There are many things going here, but in this first gospel there is a message of making the common uncommon, exceptional. Six large jugs of water to be used for purification are turned into wine. Wine that we know later will be the symbol of his blood poured out for us his beloved disciples. Water and wine common things of every day life become holy, special, very uncommon. Water and wine, blood and water serve as bookends to Jesus' ministry on earth.

We too all may think we are pretty common in our lives, except we have the opportunity to allow the Spirit to open our eyes to how uncommon, in fact special we are in God's kingdom. In fact the real gift is that we already are special and uncommon, but like our belovedness we need to claim our specialness. We need to claim our gifts. These are the gifts that we have all been given. Just like our belovedness our gifts are there waiting for us; waiting to be claimed by us.

A common issue I run into is that people do not really believe they have these gifts, they may not recognize them or that their gifts are inferior or unimportant in comparison to those of others. I know that at least some feel that some gifts are better than others was an issue for the Church in Corinth. This is why Paul wrote this letter. This is the presenting problem of today's passage.

One issue that I have noted is that many people see their flaws, their weaknesses more than they see their gifts. Here is an ancient Indian story that takes a different look at our flaws and our brokenness shows how they can be turned into a gift¹.

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

¹ This is a folktale from India.

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 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 one 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."

You see God uses us just the way we are. God can and does use us in our brokenness. However often God reveals our brokenness in a way that invites us to healing. I was reminded of an image that really speaks to me. Look in your bulletin for a half page insert that is a picture.

This is a Japanese form of art called Kintsugi: This is the art of repairing broken pottery with gold. Now the amazing thing about this is that the repaired piece of pottery is strongest where it has been repaired. The repaired flaw becomes not the problem, but the strongest and most beautiful part of the pot, bowl or dish. This also makes the piece unique. The bowl in this picture as originally made was probably one that was mass-produced. What makes it unique and more beautiful is in fact the flaw, the broken part that has been repaired.

When we let God heal our flaws, repair what is broken, God can take that brokenness and turn into something strong and beautiful.

Next Saturday our Vestry will hold their annual retreat. We are going to pick up on the theme of the past few weeks and from our Christmas services. How can we take the

light of Christ into our world, here in Virginia Beach and into the larger world? Part of this will be a discussion of gifts and how your vestry is called to use their gifts. However just asking your vestry to identify and deploy their gifts is just a beginning. In a period of transition such as we are embarking upon, it is even more critical for all of you to identify your gifts and then use them.

I found one of the daily meditations from the Society of St. John the Evangelist. picks up on this theme of strength in our brokenness.

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. SSJE

At the end of our Christmas pageant the children and youth standing up front asked "Will you be bearers of the light?" So today I ask you to consider how you might identify and use your gifts, your flaws, your brokenness and your strengths to carry the light of Christ out into our world. I pray you will say yes to this invitation from Jesus. The church needs you and so does the world.