

June 20, 2021

*The Tin Man's and Lion's Gift*

1 Samuel 17:32-37

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

As you probably know, I like the *Wizard of Oz* movie. I think that it is one of the all-time bests. Every time, I watch it, I continually get enjoyment from it—from the ruby slippers to the scarecrow, to the tin man, and even the hero Toto to the villain the Wicked Witch. Dorothy is a memorable character, not my favorite, but certainly memorable. And the cowardly lion, he fills a role with his swishing and swaying tail, but I would have to say he is my least favorite. Sometimes, I love the cuddly old wizard and sometime, I get so angry at him. If I were to guess, I would say his astrological sign is Gemini, he seems like he has two parts to his personality. Every time I watch the movie, I get a new take away from it, I focus on one character more than the next, I learn something new. Yet, I am always amazed that the everyone “gets” their gift at the end. The lion gets courage, and the tinman gets a heart. What is utterly amazing is that the gifts were present all the while.

The same can be true for Bible verses—you can see something new each time, but the God given gifts were always there. Take the story of David and Goliath. This has to be one of the most well-known stories in the Bible, with the teenager going against the tall giant. David takes the 5 smooth stones and using that sling shot, mere yarn from the sheep he watched over and shepherded, woven into a long string with a place in the middle for a stone. David twirls and flings the stone, the giant is slayed.

My Dad was a pastor. Because he worked for the presbytery, he often went to different churches to preach on Sunday. When you do that, you can take the same sermon and children's sermon with you, and no one knows the difference. He kept good records, so he didn't repeat himself. His children's sermon was David and Goliath. I would often go with him and became quite familiar with the teenager and the giant, the 5 smooth stones and the slingshot. My Dad even had a slingshot from his trip to the Holy Land that he used as a prop. But as I read the story today after hearing it so many times in my youth, I was impressed by how this is not a tale of the underdog or of military prowess or might, although it may seem like those on the surface with the mighty Philistines taking on the lowly Israelites. This is actually a story about a boy that recognized his gift, the gift of courage to trust in God.

David trusted that he didn't need the sword, the helmet, the armor, after King Saul, the appointed ruler of Israel had David dressed up in this protective fighting outfit. David knew in his heart that it was the Lord who was with him in the fields with the lion and bear as he watched over the sheep. David knew that God had given him courage and David trusted God. David used those gifts of courage and trust to protect the kingdom to which he belonged--the

kingdom of the Israelites, the kingdom of God. What David had at the moment was the gift God needed him to have to fulfill his calling.

The same is true for this not as familiar second letter to the Corinthians from Paul. Paul had gifts from God and those gifts were what was needed to help the Corinthians at that time to protect God's kingdom from false prophets, and proclaim the salvation of Jesus Christ so as to reconcile the fickle, disputing Corinthians to God, themselves and each other. When some read the middle section of today's passage, they may think that Paul is bragging on himself with his listing of his gifts of knowledge, truthful speech, and genuine love, and on and on and blah, blah, blah. In seminary preachers are taught not to talk about themselves—the gospel isn't all about the pastor or in this case, Paul. But, I think that if we read this in a different light, through a different lens, if we reframe it, we can see that Paul is so filled with emotion about sharing the good news of salvation through Christ's death on the cross, that he gets so passionate. Paul becomes so energized that all these words of his surviving his struggles, and what great persistence he has and wonderful other qualities he possesses are spewed out because he just wants people to accept the truth in what he says. He really isn't bragging but just trying to establish his authority so that the fickle, conflicted Corinthians would listen to his rhetoric and take his advice.

Paul has heart, a heart for the gospel. He is not bragging; he is trying to convince people of his case.

And maybe like David with his courage, and maybe like Paul with his heart, we too need to recognize our own gifts to proclaim salvation and promote reconciliation on this Father's Day, when all family relationships are not healthy. Reconciliation and grace need to be understood and practiced as we celebrate a new holiday, Juneteenth and the final pronouncement of freedom for slaves.

Have you recognized your gifts and are you using them to promote reconciliation with God, with others? If we are to glorify God and praise God as our chief end, like the Westminster Catechism teaches, then proclamation and reconciliation are essential practices of our lives as we reflect Christ's work on the cross for each of us.

Paul is known for his rhetoric, for making arguments like a lawyer in an opening and closing court case. You know those great arguments from Matlock, Perry Mason, Law and Order. The argument that Paul is trying to make in this opening and closing is that we need to be ambassadors for God through the actions of Christ. We are called to be ambassadors of the triune God's love through the gifts that we have, the gifts that God has given us, the gifts of courage, and heart, truthfulness, and genuine love. Paul deliberately uses that word ambassadors or *presbeutai* in Greek to denote our role. The call to be an ambassador is in our name.

Our diplomacy for the triune God needs to utilize the gifts we eventually realize we have like courage as David did and heart like Paul did. Our diplomacy for the triune God then must be shared with others, like David modeled for the Israelites, like Paul shared with the Corinthians. Our diplomacy needs to focus on the one gift that each of us has been given. The gift that Paul names at the beginning of this passage. The gift that Paul essentially pleads with his gift of heartfelt passion that is not in vain, or more meaningfully translated from the Greek, the one gift that cannot be empty or meaningless in our lives. The gift of grace. Grace= God's riches at Christ's expense. Because of Christ's work on the cross so that our sins are forgiven, we are given all of God's riches, which are peace, love, joy, reconciliation.

Grace is completely given by God, we need only to receive it. We need to make sure others receive and realize that it is not earned but is free for the taking. Paul says that at the beginning, we are to work together and accept God's grace. Then, we are to share with others. That is what we as Christians, as Presbyterians are to be about-using our specific God-given gifts to share the God-given gift of grace.

Over the last few weeks and months, in my various conversations, I have heard time and time again how the church-not necessarily this specific church has disappointed, rebuked, alienated people from the fellowship, the koinonia, the church can offer by not extending that grace, by misreading the intended use of the other person's gifts, similar to thinking that Paul was a self-centered braggart in naming his qualities. This is not reconciliation, this is the opposite, which is separation. This is not the circular model of the trinity of living together that we spoke about a few weeks ago. This is the acceptance of grace in vain, grace that is meaningless. I have been so unsettled by that. Are you? That people would not feel that the church's sanctuary is just that a sanctuary from the divisions of the world. Before we swoosh, before we judge, before we criticize, let us exemplify grace that is meaningful and not in vain or void. Let us open our hearts, dear children of God, and open our church to be a true sanctuary that welcomes, loves, and extends grace to all in meaningful ways. Let each of us specifically use the gifts God has given to us, such as courage and heart, to share God's grace with others. For as the song by the group America goes, Oz didn't give something to the Tinman, that he didn't already have. You already have a gift, use your gift, to be ambassadors for God's grace and reconciliation.