

October 10, 2021
Hope Lutheran Church
Rev. Mary Erickson
Stewardship Series: Abundant Joy Overflowing Generosity
Matthew 5:13-16

The Dazzling Gemstones in God's Jewelry Case

Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

For our fall stewardship emphasis, we've been reflecting on the theme "Abundant Joy, Overflowing Generosity."

- First, we considered "Giving God our Day." We do this by staying connected with God through prayer. Every morning when we awaken, we can lift up a prayer to God. Connecting with God through prayer, we stay tapped into the source of abundant grace. Prayer keeps God's steadfast love right where it belongs, in the center.
- Last week we focused on "Giving God our Worship." As we gather in worship, we hear the message of God's overflowing generosity to us: generosity of life and supply, overflowing grace and salvation, copious forgiveness and renewal of spirit. All this grace fills us with joy in abundance.

Today we look to "Giving God our Spiritual Gifts." Here, too, the cycle of abundance begins with God. Each of us has been endowed with a broad set of abilities, interests and knowledge. These come from God our creator. What's notable is that no two of us have been given the same set of talents. Your personal curiosities and interests have led you to develop in ways wholly unique to you. The abilities that you

have – physical, intellectual and emotional – are very different from mine.

God has endowed us all with specialized capabilities. We're each valuable and precious in our own ways.

I'm reminded of an experience I had at Lasker Jewelers. Dale and I were there to get some repair work done on my wedding ring. While we were waiting, we peered in their display cases. We walked down that long case filled with a variety of gemstones. There was a section with emeralds, another one with rubies. They had sapphires and topaz and aquamarine. It was a rainbow of gemstones.

With the incredible lighting they have in the store, the various rings and bracelets and earrings were nothing short of dazzling. Each piece of jewelry was so very different from the others: different settings, unique arrangements of stones, various colored gems. But every one of them was simply stunning under the lights.

That's what our talents are like. Every one of us is a one of a kind treasure with striking gifts.

In our story today from Exodus we hear about the construction of Israel's tabernacle. For a people on the go in the wilderness, they need a place to worship that could travel with them. Solution: a holy tent. A lot went into the construction of all the necessary things for worship: candlesticks,

incense burners, linens, priestly vestments, tables.

Amid the people of Israel, there were two men in particular. They were endowed with all kinds of artistic and crafting skills. They could work in numerous mediums, including wood, stonework, metals, fiber arts; you name it, they could do it and do it well. And not only were Bezalel and Oholiab remarkable craftsmen, they also had the ability to teach others. Moses explains that they had received all of these talents from God. They were filled with a divine spirit, they were “inspired.”

We’ve all been endowed with abilities for a purpose: so that we might use them. Skills and talents are meant to be used. They’re intended to be shared, to help us make the world a better place. These gifts allow us to serve in Christ’s name.

Jesus speaks of light. “You are the light of the world,” he says. By its nature, light reaches out. A small light source can be seen for long distances. It’s the nature of light, it spreads out and sheds light into darkness.

When John wrote his gospel, he began at the beginning, WAY at the beginning with creation. “In the beginning,” he starts. “In the beginning was the Word.” The book of Genesis describes God creating the world by speaking it into being. The Word. The first thing God creates is light.

John states, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” Christ is that unquenchable light. He is the creating word of God. In being born among us, that divine word became flesh to dwell among us. Those who tried to kill him thought they’d extinguished his light. They buried his dead body in the tomb. But in his resurrection, Jesus has shown us that

nothing can overcome the divine light of God. It’s eternal. Not even death can stop it. The light shines in the darkness.

Jesus calls us to be light in the darkness, too. In shining our light, in sharing our capabilities and wisdom and compassion, we spread the light, like one candle lighting another. And with time, it’s not the light that’s extinguished. It’s the darkness.

But sharing our light can be a frightening thing. Inspirational author Marianne Williamson nailed it when she wrote this:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world.”

We are called to be light. We’re called to be the dazzling gemstones in God’s jewelry case. I was thinking this week about some of our gems here at Hope.

This pondering started with Joan Wolf, whose memorial service was yesterday. Joan was a real gem. It was her generosity that led to the creation of this lovely central stained window. It really defines our space in here. Beyond that amazing gift, Joan was a dedicated quilter. Think of the warmth she was able to supply to so many people across our globe. She was also part of the service team at every funeral luncheon.

Who are other examples of gemstones? These are random and in no particular order:

- Butch Martin – If you need something fixed, Butch has the knowhow. Leanne

O'Bryan at Rachel's Place has Butch's number programmed into her phone.

- Vicki and Mark Knudson – Vicki and Mark have been teaching Sunday School for 3 and 4-year-olds for at least 25 years. They've taught an entire generation.
- Jacob Yates – Jacob is in 7th grade and he brings his technological skills every Sunday to help us with our cameras for streaming our services. He knows a lot about electronics.
- Andrew Smith – Andrew started helping as one of our assisting ministers when he was still in high school and he's continued doing so through college. He's led prayers and distributed communion elements.

This is just a sampling of the dazzling gems sharing their light in our ministries. We grow and stretch through serving in Christ's name. And there is joy in the sharing. In giving of ourselves and our abilities, our joy is increased. Abundant joy comes through overflowing generosity.