

**Sunday, January 18, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

### **Sermon - Using Your Gifts to Build God's Kingdom**

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There is a line that I often use in memorial services that says, “God puts certain people on our paths to teach us how we ought to be.” Every once in a while you meet someone who seems to be the pinnacle of human perfection. It might be someone who is brilliantly talented, or unusually smart, perhaps someone extraordinarily beautiful, or unwaveringly compassionate. Often, at memorial services people are eulogized as having attained that type of perfection whether or not it was so. Regardless of the validity of the praise you come away saying, I ought to try to be more like that.

The athlete’s stories that we heard earlier each told of special gift, a talent that carried them beyond the challenges of culture to a notable accomplishment. They nurtured the gifts God had given them and excelled in their chosen field.

Now you might think that you don’t have any gifts but the psalmist today provides assurance that you are wonderfully made. Everyone has a gift – something that makes them unique. This is the glory of God’s creation. Each one of us contains a spark of the divine. Our task is to fan that spark into a fire passion.

Young Samuel was able to communicate with God. Nathaneal and Philip heard Jesus’ call to leave their ordinary lives and follow him, to join in the building of God’s kingdom. This text reminds us that the Christian faith is passed from person to person. Jesus called, and people followed. Why? We don’t really know except that he was offering a message of radical transformation in a world where oppression and violence were everyday occurrences.

Martin Luther King called to followers with much the same message. From the pulpit he offered a message of radical transformation. King had the ability of Samuel to hear God’s calling; he had the trust of the disciples to heed that call and follow Jesus. He used his gifts of preaching, organizing, diplomacy – all rooted in faith – to change the world.

Two small, but important, factors impact every relationship, from families to churches to neighbourhoods. The first is our struggle to believe in our own worth and capability to rise to the challenges of modern living. This struggle manifests itself in the constant need to prove ourselves, in defensiveness when we are challenged, and in fear of sharing our resource in case we end up with less than we need. The second factor is our struggle to recognise the glory in the humanity of others – particularly those who are different from us. This results in factions and divisions between people along racial, gender, religious, sexual, economic and educational lines, and often leads us to treat one another with disdain, suspicion and even hostility. The message of this week’s Lectionary gives us ways to overcome both of these struggles. As we begin to recognise the way God has revealed God’s self to us in Christ, and how we have become, in ourselves, temple’s of God’s Spirit, we are able to accept our worth and our significance in God’s purposes and God’s domain. When this sinks into our hearts, we are able to relax into our new identity in Christ, and stop striving against others to feel good about ourselves. Secondly, when we are able to recognise God’s glory in others, and affirm them as temples of God’s Spirit,

we begin to see them as Christ and treat them as Christ, which naturally leads us into collaboration, affirmation, forgiveness and acceptance of one another. And, as we allow ourselves to believe in God's revealed glory in ourselves and those we live and worship with, we discover that God's glory is not only revealed to us, but is revealed through us.

People meet Jesus, and they are changed. Whatever their deepest need was, Jesus meets it. Then they tell others what happened.

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

“Not everybody can be famous but everybody can be great, because greatness is determined by service.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.