

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. *Amen.*

How many of you like to work jigsaw puzzles? I've recently discovered that there are several free electronic versions of jigsaw puzzles that will let you put the pieces of a puzzle together on a screen in front of you or in your lap instead of spreading it all out on the dining room table. This is especially helpful for me because my two cats love to swat things off the table and my dog waits eagerly to catch whatever they pass down to him. The only real difference between the electronic puzzles and a real one are that you can't hold the pieces in your hands. But that's okay. The color is often better than with a cardboard puzzle and you still can choose how many pieces your puzzle will have. You even have the ability to rotate the pieces to see if they'll fit one way when they didn't fit the other way.

Sorting through today's lessons and my thoughts and responses to events of this week has been kind of like working a jigsaw puzzle. St. Francis once said this: "Start by doing what's necessary, then do what's possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible." So let's give it a try.

Our lessons today begin with a beautiful passage from what is known as Third Isaiah. Written toward the end of the Israelites' exile, Isaiah writes of liberation from captivity and slavery in words that affirm the worth of these people in the eyes of God and encourages them to persevere until that time when God will restore the honor of Zion and give them a new name. "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight is in Her."

Then, as now, a person's name is a point of definition. In "Roots," the epic television series of the 1970s, the African Kunta Kinte has his foot chopped off after several failed attempts to run away. Afterward he finally gives in and accepts the name given him by his slave master. Becoming "Toby" as the master calls him, while losing the splendor, meaning, and identity of his given name, affects Kunta Kinte far more deeply than losing his foot. In contrast, for the people of Israel, the new name God will give them will help them to know joy and hope.

Moving to today's Epistle, we remember that when Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth, the young body of Christ in that place was sorting through the uneasiness caused by disagreement about a variety of issues, including the demonstration of spiritual "phenomena" in both worship and community life. The Corinthians had let themselves be divided by their disagreements. It's believed that the catalyst for this letter was the claim made by some members of the church that the spiritual gifts they exhibited to the community made them more powerful than others—made them "better" than others. Paul's response was intended to remind them first that these truly are gifts from God; second, that there are a variety of gifts and all are vital to the wellbeing of the community, and finally, that the gifts they have received are for the benefit of the body of Christ, not just those who receive them, and through the sharing of these gifts they will all become stronger in faith and practice.

Paul names a number of gifts in his First Letter to the Corinthians, but there are certainly others that are unnamed. What Paul makes clear in this passage and in the two we'll hear in the next couple of weeks is that every person who is part of the Body of Christ is important and necessary to the Body of Christ because of who they are and what they bring to the community. Today he makes it evident that each and every one of us receives spiritual gifts that make us, as a body, whole and complete. What he doesn't say, at least not in this passage, is that we use these gifts through choice. So often we hear people say they haven't been gifted by the Spirit. The truth is, though, that they have not chosen to discover what their gift is or to learn how to use it. That's a shame,

too, because accepting and using your spiritual gift is like walking through the door of a beautiful banquet, scrumptious, filling, and fulfilling. Maybe we need our mother—or others who act like her to prod us into action.

We might say that's what happened when our Lord used his gifts to change water into wine at the wedding he and his mother attended. We remember this passage as the Wedding at Cana, but it really has very little to do with the wedding! And this is a hard passage for us, I think, for several reasons. There's that little business with Jesus and his mother, a conversation that most parents and their adult children would prefer not be overheard by anyone else, as by the bazillions of folks who've read about it in John's gospel. Mary knows her son's power and wants him to use it. But that is his choice, not hers. In what some have called "the scandal of divine reluctance," Jesus tells her the lack of wine is none of their business, and that it isn't time yet for him to show himself as she wishes him to. Of course, this is not about wine any more than it is about the wedding.

Remember this is believed to be the first sign, our Lord's first miracle. We are not a culture that is aware of miracles or acknowledges it when there is one, and I suspect there are more of them than we notice. Sometimes we're too smart, too sophisticated for our own good. We have the ability to explain many things that once were inexplicable; perhaps that makes it more difficult for us to be surprised by God's acts, or to trust in God's ability to work through whatever causes us separation, like the Israelites; or division, like the Corinthians; or hesitancy to use our spiritual gifts and the power behind them for the sake of our community and the world, a world that could greatly benefit from signs and miracles.

Last Sunday we celebrated the baptism of a precious little boy, given to God in Christ by his parents, who love him very much and who also love each other very much despite the hardships and heartaches that creates for them. On Thursday, the primates of the Anglican Communion announced that a majority of them had voted to exclude the Episcopal Church from Anglican dialogues and committees for a period of three years due to the decisions made by our church's General Convention concerning gays and lesbians and marriage. This afternoon, our ecumenical community will celebrate the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his work for civil rights, work that cost him his life. It appears to me there's commonality in these three situations. So then, how do the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fit together?

First, with the love of God as expressed by the Prophet Isaiah, in the promise of salvation and vindication through the glory of God. Next, through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only to perform signs and miracles, but to bring justice and freedom and peace to all—to make the paths straight for all of God's people. And finally, through Paul's words to the Corinthians: "To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good." We will never be one in Christ if we give power to our disagreements; we can be united only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In our humanity, we are like a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces *will* fit together; we just have to find out how. And love must prevail, as the glue that will hold it all together.

Let us pray.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*