

“THE GOSPEL IN GREAT MOVIES – JOURNEYS WITH JESUS:
II – THE SEA OF GALILEE”
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John 6:1-14

The other night I had a meeting with a couple whose wedding I am going to officiate here in September. For some reason, during our meeting together, something they said triggered thoughts in me of the very first wedding I ever performed. It was way back in 1985, and I was a student pastor serving in a church right outside of Andrews Air Force Base in Washington. This wedding did not take place in the church – no, it was actually held in the backyard of the bride’s parents’ home. I don’t actually remember the names of those who were married, and I don’t remember a whole lot about the wedding – except for one thing – it was about 100,000 degrees out that day! I remember that the way we were standing put the sun directly into my eyes, and I remember watching sweat pouring off of the groom and thinking – “this is romantic!” Oh, yes, there was one more thing – a bee flew down the front of one of the bridesmaid’s dresses right in the middle of the ceremony!

Great fun!

At any rate, that wedding notwithstanding, I do love weddings. I love getting to know the couples whose weddings I officiate, and I usually get to know them pretty well, because we meet for at least three pre-marital counseling sessions ahead of time. For one of those sessions, I have the bride and groom fill out a questionnaire that deals with expectations, and family backgrounds, and faith, and a lot of other things. I ask them to fill out the questionnaires on their own, and not to discuss them with each other ahead of time.

It's always very enlightening to hear their stories – and there are two questions on that questionnaire that I think are really important.

One is “what do you like least about yourself?” and the other is “what do you like best about yourself?” Now, I want to tell you, I've never had a single bride or groom ever have any trouble coming up with things they don't like about themselves – and they run the whole gamut – temper, impatience, disorganization, my looks, jealousy – you name it. People never seem to have trouble criticizing themselves.

But it's a different story when it comes to praising themselves. Some really struggle with saying what they like best about themselves – and that's not a good thing, because if you can only think of what's wrong with you, and not what's good about you – you're in trouble when it comes to a healthy relationship.

Now, why did I bring that up today? Well, because I think those brides and grooms are not unlike many of us. We're pretty critical of ourselves. Were someone to give us the opportunity to tell what we didn't like about ourselves, we could come up with some answers pretty easily. But were someone to say, tell me what are the best things about you – well, many of us would struggle with that.

Why? Well, I think for a couple of reasons. One is that we were always taught not to be prideful – to brag – and maybe we think if we start to talk about the good things it would seem we're bragging – so we go in the opposite direction and say nothing.

The other reason that we might not be able to say good things about ourselves is because we really don't think there is anything special about us – and that is incredibly sad. Too often, we think we're just ordinary, run-of-the-mill people, nothing special. We don't see the gifts that God has given us, or we compare ourselves with others, and always come up short.

How incredibly, incredibly sad – and oh, how it must grieve God when we do that – for God has gifted every single one of us with things that make us special. God created you to be just the person you are, just the way you are, with a combination of gifts designed just for you. You are unlike anyone else in the entire universe.

The challenge for all of us is to uncover the gifts, discover the gifts, value the gifts, and use the gifts that God has given us in His service and for His kingdom. Now, I don't know what you're thinking about when I talk about the gifts that God has given you – but I suspect that some of you are thinking about the “big” gifts that you see in others – gifts like singing, and teaching, and preaching, and leading worship, evangelism, and so on. And indeed, God does put those gifts into persons.

But oh, there are so many others, and many of them may not seem so “big” in the scheme of things – but they are just as important. I read something interesting this week where the writer compared big lights like chandeliers to little lights like night lights. He said, “Sure, the chandeliers look like the bigger deal, but it's the little light like night lights that keep you from breaking your toe in the middle of the night!”

You see, all lights are important – none is more important than another – and the same goes for gifts from God. All gifts are important – all gifts. If you doubt that, let's turn again to this morning's Gospel lesson, and you'll see what I mean.

Jesus and His disciples have had a long day in ministry – a really long day in ministry. They have been surrounded by thousands of people clamoring for their attention, desperate to hear their words, and feel their touch. It was a long, intense day of ministry, and now the day has drawn near to a close, and it's dinner time.

So Jesus turns to the disciples, and says basically, "It's dinner time. How are we going to feed these people?" The disciples, being very pragmatic, could see that the task was impossible, and besides, couldn't the people just go home and feed themselves? No, Jesus saw it differently. He knew, in his heart of hearts, that it could be done, and there were gifts there to make it happen.

And lo and behold, they were. Turns out the gift-holder was a little boy, who was holding on to his sack lunch. It wasn't a big deal – at least by all outward appearances. Just some fish and bread – what could be done with that?

Yet, he offered it to Jesus, and when he did, something miraculous happened. Jesus made it enough to feed all the people – and not only that, there was a massive amount of leftovers. And none of it would have happened, if that little boy had remained silent, clutching on to his lunch, thinking to himself, "I don't have that much, it won't matter, I can't do anything to help."

Instead, he said yes – and offered what he had – meager though it was.

There’s a lesson in his story for every single one of us. Actually, several lessons.

First and foremost is this: all of us have been gifted in some way by Almighty God – all of us. Some of our gifts may be what others call “big gifts.” Some have abilities that are highly visible, and everybody sees them – like music, or athletics, or intelligence, or leadership. But a lot of our gifts are what we might not even think of as gifts – things like compassion, hospitality, patience, giving, listening.

In this morning’s film clip, the central character is a very special person, although he didn’t think of himself that way. He thought he was just an ordinary person, and in fact, others around him, that he was a little different. His name – Forrest Gump. I’m sure many of you saw the movie about him of the same name. Wonderful, wonderful movie.

If you haven’t seen the movie “Forrest Gump” I need to tell you that Forrest was a unique individual. He was born in trying circumstances – the son of a single mother living in poor conditions, and touched by a condition that made his little legs weak, so much so that he had to wear braces for support.

Life was tough for little Forrest, he got teased a lot. The first clip we’re going to see is when he first starts school, and the rough time he has at the hands of the other students.

Forrest Gump – 14:40 – 17:17

Who knew that God was going to give Forrest this special gift – the gift of running? Sure, it came about in a painful way, but God gave it to him nonetheless, and Forrest used it throughout his life.

But let's forget about Forrest for a few moments, and let me ask you this: what are the gifts God has given you? Think about that – what are the gifts God has given you? Big ones and not so big ones – ones that people may have noticed and said something about, or things that nobody knows about but you. What are the gifts God has given you?

And then, more importantly, how are you using them – or are you using them? Too often, we aren't. Too often, we compare ourselves with others, and feel we don't measure up, and so we don't say yes to using our gifts, because they're not good enough, or not as good as someone else's. What would have happened if that little boy on the hillside has thought that – thousands of people would have gone hungry!

I want to encourage you to discover and use all the gifts that God has given you by way of some stories of people who are doing just that around here. Why, just this week, Vacation Bible School was possible because gifted people said yes to sharing those gifts!

Those who could teach said yes, those who could cook for the children said yes, those who have compassion and patience, said yes to being helpers, those who have a knack for crafts helped in that area, those who can sing and dance, led in that way, those who are story tellers shared their stories. It was incredible!

And you know what, their using and sharing their gifts was contagious – it inspired the children to do the same. The children discovered their gifts of song, and movement, and creativity, and story-telling. They opened up their hearts and shared their gifts of generosity to raise money for the Freedom Hills Riding Center. It was an incredible week!

And even now, others of our church are using their gifts on the mission trip to Kentucky! They left yesterday morning, and will be gone for a week. Does every person on that team have carpentry skills to build and repair houses? No. Does every person know plumbing or HVAC? No. But does every person have a gift – yes – and they have gone there to use those gifts to touch the lives of hurting people in a hurting part of our world.

Look around you in this room, and you'll see so many people sharing their gifts. Musicians making wonderful music, greeters sharing the gift of hospitality, ushers and worship leaders and readers sharing gifts that make worship easier for all. It takes so many people saying yes to using their God-given gifts every week to make things happen around here – thank goodness they do!

I want to tell you about one thing that really moved me recently. In new members' classes, I often ask the new members two questions: "What brought you to our church initially? And what made you stay?" One of our newest members said something that I will never forget. She said she came to our church initially because of our church's website, but she stayed because of the "Knights in Shining Armour" our wonderful parking lot attendants. Every week, she knows that when she pulls in the parking lot, someone will be there to help her with her children, to get them safely to the door, and will be there with an umbrella when it rains, and will be there to lend a helping hand and offer a smile.

Opening a door, putting up an umbrella, lending a helping hand, giving a smile – would you call those “big” gifts from God – maybe not, but in God’s eyes they are, and they need to be shared with a hurting world. You have gifts that God has given you, and God needs you to share them. Who knows what God can do through you?

Before we end, let’s revisit Forrest Gump for a few moments. As we saw earlier, God gave Forrest the gift of running. Would it be something that would change his life? In fact, yes, it was. But it not only changed his life, it changed some others as well. Take a look at the screen and see what I mean.

Forrest Gump – 50:40 – 52:20

God took the plain, ordinary gift of running in Forrest’s life and touched other lives in extraordinary ways. And God can do the same things with the gifts He has given you, if only you will say yes to using them. My prayer is that you will take a serious look at yourself, and discover the gifts – all the gifts God has put into you, and then ask Him to show you all the ways you can use them in His service, and for His kingdom. You will be amazed at the doors God will open if you will just say yes to using the gifts He has given you. May it be so.

Amen.