

Sermon: **Made Able with a Touch of Faith**

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I put it in quotation marks, and Googled it: "God gave me the ability". In a number of cases it seemed that this expression was a casual cliché, for others it is a common phrase of faith, but in a few instances there seemed to be something more profound being shared with the media audience.

Here are a few of them:

"God gave me the ability to forget every defeat"

"God gave me the ability to rap, produce and make music."

"Her brother and I were in our recovery rooms; him with a new lease on life and me knowing God gave me the ability to give it to him."

"God gave me the ability to communicate His message of hope and love to others."

"God gave me the ability to juggle, and I am determined to use this ability to his glory whenever possible!" Gospel Jugglers

"God gave me the ability to discern the best way to use my talents."

"God gave me the ability to be a baseball player"

" Then I had to wait until **God gave me the ability.**"

"God gave me the ability to draw and humorously illustrate points or events and I have been doing that for years."

"The Lord **God gave me the ability** to teach so that I know what to say to make the weak strong."

" I can run. I can jump. I can block shots. I can dunk. But I can't take pride in that. I'm successful because **God gave me the ability.**" – David Robinson

"God gave me the ability to play, there's no doubt about that. The drive to keep playing is the enjoyment of creativity. The ability to make people's hair stand up. Including my own." Rick Ray; Musician

"I truly felt released when **God gave me the ability** to say "No" to certain projects." – Computer Technician

"Anything I achieve in my life is because **God gave me the ability** and talent in the first place." – Music Magazine

In reading scripture we begin to encounter some key figures; Noah, who built a colossal boat to save all of the creatures from destruction, the first great ecologist; Abraham, who stood up to foreign kings, operated a multi-national agricultural corporation, and founded a nation through his children; Deborah, who spearhead the army that would settle a long-standing dispute, and give God's people a solid foothold in the Gezreal Valley in the fertile crescent of the east; David and Solomon who stood up to the world and made their nation the most prosperous it would ever be; Ester, who stood up for her people even though she and they were in the position of slaves and could be killed for self assertion.

In simply surveying a few of these major personas of scripture one can become a little daunted at the prospects of such endeavours. None of us have taken on the heroic roles of these spiritual ancestors, and yet here we are as heirs of their endeavours. We

really have to first ask the question: 'How can we claim the same faith as those people mentioned in scripture when what we have to show for our faith is so much less than they did?'

This is one of those points that baffles the world. When the outside world looks at Christian faith, there is a common belief that we are somehow trying to achieve the achievements of the prophets saints and apostles. I am certain that it would be a great deal easier for the outside world to take us seriously if we were each in here causing the heavens to crash down on all those who persecuted us and the Word of God. I am sure that we would have a line up at the door if with our prayers people were instantly and miraculously cured of any disease that was put before us.

But the reality is that we are not given the ability to do those things that Elijah did, or that the apostles did, but do the things that God has given us to do. And the gifts are here, the ability is here, but we very often need a touch of something else in order to make that faith work.

Just as the seed must be surrounded in moisture in order for its hard shell to soften and the young plant to spring forth and grow into something great, so with the ability planted in us for the very miraculous things God would have us do, requires the soft blessing that causes us to bud.

The careful gardener looks at soil and sees more than simply dirt. A good gardener looks at the soil and sees all the potential in it for supporting the seeds and bulbs planted in it. At time the soil has to be worked and sometimes even more nutrients have to be added, and this is not always a clean and gentle process.

Our abilities, those gift so full of potential for doing God's will in the world; in showing hospitality to others, for offering comfort in difficult times, in laying roads for peace and reconciliation. All of God's gifts to us of musical ability, critical understanding, technical skill, are laid together in the soil of this congregation so that from this place a beautiful garden of God's love can blossom.

Yet one thing remains. We have in this place the fellowship and support that allow God's gifts to grow, but from God we need watering, and we need to accept that watering. When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman by the well, he spoke to her of a drink that would make it so she would never be thirsty again: water that would cause to erupt in her a well-spring of eternal refreshment. And we are offered the same water; with the same power of that 'water' to bring to life all of the ability of this garden of God's gifted children.

Faith: for in order to be able to do anything in life you first must have the belief that it can be done. It was once believed that propelled flight was impossible, and the Wright brothers believed that it was possible. It was once believed that polio was a part of the human condition, and yet Jonas Salk developed a vaccine. And computer systems were supposed to take up entire skyscraper structures by this point, until technicians and scientists of the late sixties developed the microprocessor, and changed our lives forever.

But that is limited faith, only in the ability itself, but the infinite possibility that you are invited in Christ is the faith that is eternal, and takes all that you do to ends far beyond that which you could believe to be possible.

Peter was a fisherman. Yet at the Beautiful gate of the temple this fisherman gave a poor lame man the ability to walk. It was more than Peter's belief in his own

ability that did this, yet it was faith. It was faith in Jesus the Christ that gave Peter the strength to inspire that man to walk, and so also the faith and ability of the man was inspired.

But just as with the hard coating of the shell of seed, so our disbelief covers our abilities. Hard-headed Thomas, in our reading from the gospel today, could not believe without the physical presence of God. Life is harder for those who have not softened to faith. Their abilities go unfulfilled, their hopes and dreams are but shadows reflected darkly upon the reflection in their baptismal waters.

For it is in faith that we find and discover, in ourselves and in the world around us, *real truth*. Limited to only what we can believe ourselves we will never reach the full potential of the abilities God has entrusted to us; therein lies our deep sin. But with faith in Christ we can realize the truth: the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and the dead in Christ shall rise.

As the writer to the Hebrews said, that today was read, and I will repeat for you again: ¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the men of old received divine approval. ³By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.”

Faith, Truth by faith, and by it we are at last set free.