

With What Does the Love of God Endow Us?

Beloved friends, as we gather on this Baptism of Christ Sunday and this Rev. Dr. King Sunday morning, our scripture readings invite us to wonder: With what does the Love of God endow us?

In the reading from Isaiah, we have just heard these words of affirmation: *“I have endowed you with my Spirit”* (Isa. 42: 1b).

Have you been endowed with other gifts during your lifetime?

The word “endow” comes from the Latin *dotare*, the root of which is *dos*-meaning gift. We commonly use the word according to two different meanings. To endow means *“to provide for the continued support or maintenance of”* (Merriam Webster Dictionary). In your lifetime, has a family member given you an endowment by purchasing a government bond or starting a savings account to support your education years later? Has a loved one bequeathed to you a treasured piece of art or jewelry that regularly reminds you of their continued loving presence with you?

To endow also means *“to provide with something freely or naturally”* (MWD). With what qualities has Creator God endowed you? Sensitivity, an analytical mind, artistry, self-confidence, empathy?

When I ask, with what does the Love of God endow us? – I mean to incorporate both meanings of the word. With what does God provide us *“freely and naturally”* that *“continues to support and maintain us?”*

I invite us this morning to notice and explore how the Love that is God endows us with power, purpose, strength and possibility. Let us pray.

God, we long to believe even more deeply and trust that we are your own – your beloved, fully endowed with your love. As we explore how we will embody that in our lives; grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change things that we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

At the start of this new year, we are resetting in many ways. Individually, regardless of whether or not we have formed new resolutions, we have likely paused to some degree to ask ourselves questions: What is working in my life right now? And what is not working very well? Where might I recommit myself to an effort? And where might I try something new?

As a congregation, we are resetting as we look toward our Annual Meeting, which occurs two weeks from today. At that time, we will:

- review and affirm the work of our Finance Committee and Leadership Team who have developed a budget – a plan for purposefully using resources for ministry in this new year.
- And we will vote on the proposal by our Leadership Team to explore the option of merger with our neighbors at St. Peter's United Church of Christ, with a joint church task force to guide our exploration.

As we individually move into a new year (discerning both new and renewed commitments) and as we collectively move toward two important decisions at our congregation's Annual Meeting, we need to be very clear about that with which the Love of God endows us – because we need to lean into those gifts of power, of purpose, of strength, of possibility.

Discovered In 2020, the Rev. Dr. King wrote a brief note in the mid-1960s that seemed to articulate his understanding of the essence of love. King wrote: *"Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. [The one] who loves is a participant in the being of God."*

I'll read that again (words from the Rev. Dr. King): *"Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. [The one] who loves is a participant in the being of God."*

In part, I've derived my idea of a four-part endowment from the Rev. Dr. King's words.

Power is part of our endowment from God. We heard "*Love is the greatest force in the universe.*" Judeo-Christian scriptures guide us by an understanding that God, the divine essence that we worship IS love. God is an all-powerful loving energy or, in King's words, "*the greatest force.*" **I wonder, when have you felt that greatest force in the universe empowering you when you really needed it most?**

Purpose is part of our endowment from divine Love. Our purpose, modeled by Jesus and so many faithful ones across the expanse of time, is loving compassion. In King's words, "*[The one] who loves is a participant in the being of God.*" Faith without action (faith without embodied loving behavior) is inert – dead. Divine Love endows us with the eternal and steady purpose of love embodied as compassion – compassion toward self and toward other. **I wonder, do you need this reminder today that compassion is your God-given purpose and that, if you practice compassion for yourself and for the other today, you are fulfilling your purpose. Your efforts have impact.**

Strength is part of our endowment from divine Love. King wrote that love "*is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos.*" Life experience has taught all of us how our physical heartbeat and respiration are signs of our vitality – signs of life. Divine Love endows us with the knowledge that we are beloved. That belovedness drums within us – a vital heartbeat that reminds us how we come from Love and will always return to Love. The heartbeat of our belovedness grants us the strength we need to keep participating in our purpose of compassion, leaning into the power that Love shares among all of creation.

I wonder, in what context, relationship, or experience can you recognize and affirm that you have leaned into the heartbeat of your belovedness in order to discern the next right step to take in compassion?

Possibility is part of our endowment from divine Love. The Rev. Dr. King is remembered often and powerfully for his dream of a beloved community – one in which Love works hard to break down walls that divide us and instead sews seeds of mutuality. Jesus prayed that God would bring a loving kindom on Earth. In this morning's quotation from King, in what will Love empower our participation? He wrote, "*[The one] who loves is a participant in the being of God.*" We are endowed with the purpose of co-creating the very being of God – the manifestation of Love – a beloved community – the kindom of God in this time and space which we occupy.

I wonder, do you know that you are essential to God's purpose of co-creating a beloved community – a kindom of Love? Will you live into the possibility with which you are endowed – bravely taking the next right step you have discerned?

Let's turn now to our scripture readings for today, briefly examining how they might inform and encourage us around our four-part endowment from God's Love – gifts of **power, purpose, strength, and possibility.**

We heard, from the prophet Isaiah:

"Here is my Servant, whom I uphold – my chosen one, in whom I delight! I have endowed you with my Spirit, that you may bring true justice to the nations" (Isa. 42:1).

Each of us is that servant whom God has created and chosen, endowed with the Spirit of Love in order to delight the world. Each of us has a divine purpose to delight the world in our own individual peculiar ways.

And our congregation has a divine purpose to delight the world in our own collective peculiar way.

The voice of God as channeled by Isaiah calls us to gentle leadership. The writer affirms, “...*faithfully you will bring forth justice... I, God, have called you to serve the cause of right; I have taken you by the hand, and I watch over you. I have appointed you to be a covenant people, a light to the nations*” (Isa 42:3,6).

We are empowered and strengthened by Love’s hand-grasping presence with us and Love’s confident appointment of each of us and of our congregation as a whole community to “*bring forth justice,*” “*serve the the cause of right,*” and be “*a light to the nations.*”

And how does the gospel story for today inform and encourage us around our four-part endowment from God’s Love – gifts of **power, purpose, strength, and possibility.**

We heard John the Baptizer say to the crowd, “*Change your hearts and minds, for the reign of heaven is about to break in upon you!... Give some evidence that you mean to reform!*” (Mt. 3:2, 8).

John passionately overflowed with a longing for people to know that we can all do better. We just plain can! And there doesn’t need to be shame in that recognition. There needs to be plain-hearted recognition of better possibilities of which we are capable.

John also said of Jesus, “*That one will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire, whose winnowing fan will clear the threshing floor*” (Mt. 3: 11b-12a).

As we move into the coming days in our lives, may we harness the strength to come with the recognition that there is chaff that each of us needs to shed from the core, beloved wheat that we each are.

Most importantly, Jesus and all who were around him heard the eternally true voice of the Love of God saying to him then and to each of us now, *“This is my own, my beloved, on whom my favor rests”* (Mt. 3:17).

It is as true for each of us as it was about Jesus.

As we move further into this Epiphany season and a new calendar year, may we move mindfully, trusting in the resources with which the Love of God endows us – gifts of **power, purpose, strength, and possibility.**

May we continue with the Rev. Dr. King to *“participate in the being of God,”* what John the Baptizer and Jesus would call the *“kingdom of heaven.”* Love is counting on us. Amen!

Rev. Clare Gromoll
People’s Congregational Church (Bayport, MN)
January 15, 2023 (2nd Sunday after Epiphany)
Isaiah 42: 1-9, Matthew 3: 1-17