

Maundy Thursday
April 18, 2019
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

All About the Bling

What is it that we humans love more than anything? Bling! I love bling. I think most of us do, even if some do not admit it. We love shiny things, things that sparkle and spark our imagination. Gold and glitter, silver bells, when we celebrate, we decorate with brightness, and color, and bling. We are on this earth, and we are fascinated with fire, and lightening, and gold, glitz and, bling.

In the days of Solomon, everything was covered with gold. We are attracted by wealth, beauty, glamour, and bling. When the prodigal son returned, his father put a ring on his finger—bling. And then, there was the feast and the party—food bling! And, who doesn't want to be invited to the party, to have nice things around them, to wear fine clothes, and to have a little bling in their lives? Madison Avenue would have us believe that all we need is bling. Bling will make us happy, and we should go for it.

We follow people who have bling, gold, money, glamour. Our role models are mostly wealthy, dangling the carrot of success in front of us. Bolstering our egos to believe that with self-reliance, and hard work we too can claw our way to the top and go for the gold! In a recent Lenten meditation, St. John's parishioner *Lauren Edwards* put it this way, *"Today we often have a very hard time seeing, and sometimes even believing, in the possibility of divine miracles made possible through Jesus Christ. When good things happen to us, we believe it is the result of all our hard work or our ability to muscle our way through problems. When problems go away, we often dismiss the hand of God' and simply say, 'These things have a way of working out.' It is hard to believe in miracles. They (miracles) seem the work of a Biblical Harry Potter, a fictional account from an author with an amazing imagination."*

But people are not God, and all that glitters is not gold. There are some things more valuable than gold, or power, or fame. Still, it is tough not to be distracted by bling, not to long for some creature comforts, to want good food, nice shelter, and to get our 15 minutes of fame. It is hard to follow Jesus, and not trend-setters who model glamorous lifestyles—we are hard-wired to want to keep up with the Jones's.

The Psalm today asks, "How shall I repay the Lord for all the good things he has done for me? This question fits well in the season of Lent, especially as Jesus is about to sacrifice his life for us. The spirit of the psalm captures our desire to give gifts to God in gratitude for our many blessings. Gratitude is the cornerstone of our Lenten disciplines, in giving up our earthly "bling" to give thanks to God.

Psalm 116 in its entirety, is a good account of what it means to trust God in challenging circumstances. The NSRV titles it, "Thanksgiving for Recovery from Illness," and we all need healing at some point from illness of body, mind, or spirit. The Psalm is about suffering, doubt and hope, and it is about giving thanks for healing, and then a vow that will be fulfilled in response. *"How will I begin to give something back to God for the life I have been given?"* I thought of some ways I could try and pay back God. None of them included buying a bejeweled phone case for Jesus. Earthly things are of no use to God. Yet, we bejewel the people and things we love, under the assumption that shiny things are beautiful.

Glamour, bling, and earthly things are not the kind of gifts we vow to give to God in thanksgiving. I think God's favorite bling are our gifts of love, kindness, patience, empathy, humility and compassion. We all know why we are here today, and the Gospel tells the story of Jesus showing his friends exactly what it means to give of himself completely, and humbly serve others with love.

Love manifests itself in our lives in beautiful ways. Holding someone's hand when they are afraid is beautiful. Cooking a meal for someone who is too sick to fix food for themselves is beautiful. Answering the same question over and over from a parent with dementia as if you were hearing it for the first time is beautiful. Setting aside our status in life and getting our hands dirty working to be good stewards of each

other is beautiful. Easing and soothing the tired feet of a friend is a lowly task, but it is beautiful. And nothing shines brighter than the eyes of a friend, seeing that you came unexpectedly when they needed you the most.

Love is all you need, and it manifests itself in simple ways every day. In hugging someone when they need it, letting someone in front of you in traffic, saying we are sorry, accepting an apology, complimenting someone, really listening to people when they talk, speaking of people with kindness and respect, doing something nice for someone just because you can. Being open and listening to God, is the best way to know what God would like us to return in thanksgiving. When we are open to God, our attention is taken away from earthly bling.

When I was a child, I noticed that my parents did not get as many Christmas or Birthday gifts as my sisters and I did. When asked what they wanted as a gift, they often said they did not need anything, and as a child it was difficult for me to understand why they did not want more things to make them happy. When it was Grandma's BD the gifts were even scarcer, but we gathered as a family, laughing, sharing stories, just being there together in love. The gifts she received were the joy in the laughter, the warmth of sharing memories, and the service of cleaning up her house after the party, and making sure her needs were met – our presence and our service were our gifts to her. The best gifts we can give God is the gift of presence and service to each other. We can also, be still, and feel God's presence. God is love. Love is not served by earthly things, Love serves others.

The Gospel story tells us that this night we remember, Jesus serving his friends. Out of love for them, he performed the lowly task of washing their feet. It was dirty work, but it set an example for them of what leadership looks like in the Kingdom of God. In earthly kingdoms, leadership wields power, and holds "bling" over our heads as a reward. In God's Kingdom love, peace, patience, and servitude are held up as examples of how we should lead and serve each other. Jesus commissioned us in the Gospel: "*As the Father sent me, I also send you.*" Jesus sends us all, wherever we are, whoever we are, and just as we are. We are worthy, we are enough, just as we are, no exceptions, and no bling required, just the willingness to be open to God.

Dancer and choreographer, Martha Graham said: "*There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open.*" Keeping our channel open also means being open to serve your brothers and sisters. Those "urges that motivate me" are often what I refer to as the small, still voice within. Your actions, your fulfilling your vows to give something back to God in gratitude is unique. Be open to letting God's life force work through you so the world may receive your offering, your gift to God. Love each other. Serve each other. It is all God really wants, and all we really need to seek to do, to inherit the whole Kingdom. Amen.

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14
Psalm 116:1, 10-17
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35