

# God gives the cup, then pours

Craigville  
Family Camp today,  
on "Talents"

Yesterday, a phoner from NYC had only this to say: "I just discovered these words of Saint-Exupery: 'Behind all things seen there is a door opening onto things unseen.'" As this was an architectural metaphor for Plato's idea-lism (viz., that every appearance [Gk., "~~pheno~~-~~menon~~"] is a visibilization of a cosmic "idea" [Gk., a thought -- "nou"-menon, a superior reality invisibly "seen"], I responded (not with this abstract verbiage but) with a tactile metaphor Plato uses for the human capacity to retain knowledge, a native capacity enlarged by experience: a "receptacle." So I said what is this Thinksheet's title.

The metaphor you are using in your Family Camp is from Jesus (Mt.25.14-30--"talents" [RSVn: 1 = "more than 15 years' wages of a laborer"] / L.19.11-27--"pounds" [RSVn: 1 = "about three months' wages for a laborer"])). (In both Gospels, no change in NRSV; CEV has "coins" in Mt. & "some money" in L.) The metaphoric meaning--God gives each of us capacities/abilities/"gifts" we are to steward for his glory, for human good, & for the good of the whole earth--is implied in Mt.vs.15 NRSV, "to each according to his ability" (different amounts: in L., the same amount to each).

1 What we are capable of (i.e., what we can do) we are **trusted** with (i.e., expected to do). By whom? Mt.25.14: "a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and **entrusted** his property to them" (here, Jesus' commission to his disciples for their service between his Resurrection & his Return); L.19.12: "a nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself [as a vassal king from an overlord] and then return. He summoned ten of his slaves, and **gave** them...[each the same amount of money], and said to them, 'Do business with...[this] until I come back.' But the citizens of his country hated him...."

In this Thinksheet's metaphor, what we are "trusted with" [to use], what God "gave" us [to use], is, for each of us, a **cup** which we are to hold out for God's **pouring** in (1) what specifically we are to do & (2) commensurate blessings for the doing thereof (Mal.3.10: "I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance....").

2 We have only a limited amount of **time** to put our talent to the Master's use (in Jesus' financial metaphor, to invest toward profit for our Owner, who bought us with the price of his blood). The three canonical times our Lord uses this story (the 3rd is M.13.34), he is speaking of our task before the Parousia, the Second Coming (& the three Evangelists, the Synoptists [Mt., L., & M.], use the story to defend against impatience that Jesus' return seems delayed [as the "scoffer" in 2P.3.4 mocks "Where is the promise of his coming"? = Where is his promised coming? [a Hebraism for "He hasn't come & is not coming"])). The hymn adduces a natural fact: "Work, for the night is coming." None of us is going to get out of this (physically) alive. But atop that is the supernatural fact of the Second Bang, history's end (the 1st one being "the Big Bang," the beginning of the cosmos). So hear Jesus (in M.13.34-37): "a man going on a journey...puts his slaves in charge, each with his work," then he "comes suddenly," so "Keep awake!"

3 God does not pour where there is no cup, or where the cup is not held out open-side up. Corpses have no cup: while there's life, there's cup (something you can/should do "for the praise of God's glory"). For while there's life, there's longing: conscious longing is awareness of an unfilled cup held out open-side up. When it becomes intense, it's a good fit for the German word *Sehnsucht*, yearning-passion, passionate yearning/longing/craving/desire--which is not an add-on to, but a natural component of, life.

Now let's use Luke's form of our story: the hated nobleman (one of Jesus' shocking role-metaphors for God) gives every slave the same amount of money to produce increments for him: God gives everybody *Sehnsucht* (though in different-sized dollops/intensities/cups: my metaphor is plastic [no plastic cup, though]).

4 As Jesus tells the "talents" story variously to fit various situations, I'm using the cup metaphor variously--right now, for the four natural powers I'll call spirit,

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soul, mind, & body. Think of these as four cup-yearnings. We have various names for what gets poured into them from the one jug labeled "Sehnsucht," which takes the shape of each cup. "Worship" is what the spirit-cup longs for (as in my book-title FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT). "Fantasy" is what the soul-cup yearns for (as in the Wizard of Oz: "Somewhere, over the rainbow /...../ Birds fly over the rainbow, / Why can't I?" [the longing for wings, in Ps.55.6]). "Knowledge" is what the mind-cup yearns for (but most deeply [as in Jas.1.5], "wisdom"). And "food/drink/clothing/shelter/sex" is what the body-cup yearns for.

5 Remember Jesus' parable of the enemy who, the night after you've sowed grain, sneaks in & scatters weedseed all over your field (Mt.13.24-30)? You didn't know it till sprouting-time, then had to wait till harvest to tear up & burn the weeds before processing the grain. Well, "the enemy" ("the evil one" Jesus in the Lord's Prayer calls him) tries to pour poison into all four of our cup-yearnings. You can easily label the four with words of **temptation**. (Please do so before proceeding with this Thinksheet.)

In the NT, the chief word for "temptations" (inner urges to do wrong) is also the chief word for "trials" (external tests). Jas.1.13: "God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one," but he does test us for our strengthening & wisening. The hymn asks "Are there trials and temptations, / Is there trouble anywhere? / Take them all to Jesus, / He will all your burdens bear."

Immediately after Jas. says "God...tempts no one," he adds this: "But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved."

6 How does this temptation theme fit into our "talents" theme? Thus: Your temptations correlate in intensity with your "talents." E.g., if you're no good at math, you'll not "cook the books" (cheat on the ¼ly bottom-lines); but the public beware if you're an unscrupled CEO or auditor! (The LATimes of late has taken to the phrase "ethical capitalism," now that we've become so keenly aware of the other kind.) WARNING: It's easy to condemn some sinner who yielded to a temptation you yourself do not have (because you have no cup for it, or a smaller cup). For the sake of social order, we must be "judgmental" (& Wall St. won't recover if none of the rascals goes to prison): for the sake of wisdom, we must discern & weigh the facts: & for the sake of love, we must have compassion on the wayward & seek their redemption.

7 In the original & in translation, one of the NT's most beautiful sentences is Jas.1.17. It uses terms from Greek astronomy to bespeak God as the source & steady support of all "gifts" (including both natural talents & supernatural "charisms" [spiritual gifts given to the Church [& indirectly to the world] in specific "members" of "the Body"). You would do well to read the verse in a number of translations. For this Thinksheet, I'll translate thus: "All of God's givings, and all of his gifts, come from above and perfectly fit his intentions for them. They come down from the Father of the stars, whose will does not waver or go into eclipse." The next four verses say that those intentions include that we experience "birth by the word of truth" (the word of the Gospel: Jn.3.3-7; Titus 3.5; 1P.1.3,23); besides this supernatural birth, the phrase can mean our natural birth in Eden). The word is first said to be the source of created & redeemed life; then it is described (in Stoic fashion) as "implanted" ("the implanted word that has the power to save your souls").

8 Think, now, of the biblical characters. What were the gifts God gave them? To Adam, the gift of life. To Abraham, the gift of hearing & obeying the Bat Qol, God's voice. To Moses, the gift of.... To David,... The Bible shows us what it tells us.

9 But how do you discover your natural/supernatural gifts? I hate the tempting phrase (of mythologist-seducer Joseph Campbell) "Follow your bliss," for it straight-lines you to hell if you follow only your own narcissitic impulses. But what you enjoy doing is probably what you do best, & is a clue. The charisms, however, are to be discerned by the Christian community, to whom God gives them.