

WUC Message
January 20, 2013
By Celia McBride

Two stories that have affected me deeply in recent days are the Connecticut shooting of 20 children and six adults by Adam Lanza (who also killed himself), and the suicide of Jacintha Saldanha, the British nurse who was tricked by a couple of deejays into divulging information about the hospital stay of Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge. When Saldanha found out she'd been duped by a hoax she hanged herself.

Both of these stories, for me, indicate real symptoms of our broken world and our individual brokenness.

Why does a 20-year old boy feel that a killing spree is actually a viable option for dealing with his troubles?

Why does a 46-year old woman feel so profoundly ashamed that she actually takes her own life?

I believe at least part of the answer results from our skewed value system. We worship at the altar of the market economy and in doing so we have lost sight of who we really are.

We have lost sight of the manifestation of the Spirit, which is given to each one of us by God for the profit *of all*.

That is a very different kind of profitability and those words are from today's reading in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.

The reading tells us that God distributes gifts to each one of us individually.

It tells us that these gifts are the manifestation of God's will and that we have them not for our singular gain but for the profit *of all*.

Our inability to see this, to recognize our God-given gifts, to remember who we really are, is what the great writer and spiritual guide Henri Nouwen calls "self-rejection."

And I believe it is self-rejection that lies at the core of the violence, the shame and the brokenness of our world and in the actions of individuals like Adam Lanza and Jacintha Saldanha.

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Self-rejection, as Nouwen defines it, is not only “doubting who we truly are.” It is “the darkness of not feeling truly welcome in human existence.

[It] is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that declares we are loved.”

And isn't this love best expressed in us by these gifts, these manifestations of Spirit that are bestowed upon each of us by God?

The 1 Corinthians reading names some of these gifts for us: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healings, the workings of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues.

We can find more contemporary language to describe the gifts that we may have been given today. They might be artistic or intellectual gifts. One might have a way with animals or be good with children or have a particular affinity for caring for the elderly. One might be a good listener or naturally humble or innately generous.

Maybe your gift is that you know how to be kind to telemarketers. I'm quite serious! I don't have that gift. We think in order for something to be a gift it has to make us famous. No. Our gift can be something as anonymous as being able to be considerate to salespeople.

Whatever one's particular gift might be it is important to remember it is God who is working behind it. Knowing that a gift has been bestowed begets humility. “I did not give myself this gift.”

This acknowledgement of God's generosity roots me in remembering who I am and that I am loved.

So when someone says, “Wow, what an amazing thing you did!” we can say, “Thank you,” and then, “Thanks God.” We can receive the praise, because we are worthy of it, and then we can give it back to where it belongs.

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What was Adam Lanza's gift? Did he even know he had one? If he had known, if his gift had been acknowledged and nurtured and validated would he still have been compelled to commit such an act of killing as he did?

We don't know. If we are to be comforted by the words of Scripture then we may perhaps trust that he would not have resorted to such a violent act. On the contrary, if he had known who he was then his gift would have flowered for the profit of all.

What about Jacintha Saldanha? What was her gift? If she had known her gift, if she had had any sense of her belovedness, surely after having made the very forgivable mistake of falling for a prank her shame would not have been so great that she hanged herself.

If each of us is bestowed with a gift from God and yet each of us is also, in our very humanness, subject to this kind of terrible self-rejection, how then do we bridge that gap?

How does a person afflicted with self-rejection come to know the gift that has been distributed to him or her by God's loving will?

And how does he or she come to express that gift in life for the profit of all?

As some of you know, I will be leading a study group called Experiencing Jesus, based on the Marcus Borg book *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*.

Borg's way of describing Jesus is "of what can be seen of God in a human life." What this God is like, the character of God, is revealed to us in Jesus, in the way that Jesus was and by the way that he lived.

For me, this is the most compelling reason to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus, quite simply, embodies the qualities of what this Mystery we call God is: Courage, Justice, Presence, Tenderness, and Love.

If I know that the character of God can be seen and known in the human life of a man named Jesus then I begin to see that it is possible for the character of God to also be seen and known in me.

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There is no room for self-rejection in this knowing. The character of God can be seen and known in each and every single one of us.

And it can be seen and known in us, very specifically, through our individual gifts.

And yet... we are not currently living in a world that is necessarily devoted to discovering, nurturing and cultivating these individual gifts.

Small pockets of our world, yes. But the dominating powers we are living under, and taking part in, are driven by the idea that money is what makes the world go 'round.

And even though most of know this is *insane* we continue to buy into it. And it's forced down our throats through a constant bombardment of advertising everywhere we go.

Do you know, my bank never used to have an illuminated board flashing ads at me while I waited in line for the teller. It does now.

And Tokyo Sushi on Main Street now has two televisions for your viewing pleasure.

I cannot sit at YVR and wait for a plane without hearing a television somewhere nearby making sure I am informed about what is happening and what I need to buy. Well, no one talks to each other in the airport anymore anyway. We're all on our smart phones.

So discovering, nurturing and cultivating our individual gifts requires a different kind of world than this one. It requires a world that values community above individualism, service above work, God above Self.

It requires a world that recognizes that our gifts are bestowed upon us by Grace and that if we use them rightly then everybody benefits. *For the profit of all.*

How do we live in that world? We make it.

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We make it. We start now. We don't wait.

I think so many of us are waiting for this big seismic shift to happen *to us*. Something really bad is going to happen to us someday if we don't recycle. Am I wrong in thinking there was some kind of disappointment when Y2K and the Mayan prophecy didn't stop the madness? Because we all would like it to stop. Wouldn't we?

We don't have to wait for the apocalypse for it to stop. We don't have to self-destruct to learn the lesson. The lesson is already known. We know it.

Jesus gave us the lesson. "Know who you are."

Know who you are. Gosh, it sounds so easy doesn't it?

Believe me, I know it's not. It is very simple. It is not easy. I suffer from self-rejection most of the time and I pray to be relieved of my shortcomings and to recognize and utilize my gifts every single day.

And some days are better than others.

I just think about that boy. That 20-year old boy who resorted to blowing people away because he did not know who he was.

And I think of the dead he left in his wake and their gifts, lost, or, perhaps, more hopefully, transformed.

I think about that nurse. Sticking her head in a noose in the hospital where she worked because she did not know who she was.

Know who you are. Remember your gift. Serve God with it. If you don't know what your gift is, ask God, "What is the gift you have bestowed upon me to serve the world for the profit of all?"

Become willing to hear it. Become willing to change if what you hear is not what you wanted to hear.

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If you don't have the strength to overcome the fear, the incredible fear that tells us we are something other than beloved, or, if you know that already and you are running from it, then ask for help.

Just say, "Please help me." Say it to God. Say it to anyone. Just say it. Ask.

And don't wait. This is how we change the world. This is how we heal our brokenness. We do it now.

The second coming is right now. It's not the future. It's potential is always right now. Because it happens the moment we say yes to it. The moment we say yes to knowing who we are the resurrection takes place.

This is the Mystery of the Christ. This is God at work in us. Not two thousand years ago. Not when the world ends. Right now.

Amen.