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Christ Church West Wimbledon
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A story. An elderly woman had two large water pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walks from the stream to her house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on every day, with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its full pot of water. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do. After two years of this seemingly bitter failure, the cracked pot spoke to the woman one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house". The old woman smiled, "Yes, but have you noticed that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw and knew there wasn't anything I could do to repair the crack – so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path and every day while we walk back you water them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty in the house which you have provided."

Each of us has our own unique flaw. Not one of us is perfect. Each of us is like the cracked pot, each with our own imperfections, some obvious but some hidden – but for all of us it's our cracks and flaws that make our lives so unique. "Wisdom comes with age" they say and maybe that story illustrates something of that maxim. Wisdom, which comes with age, teaches us to look at each person for what and who they are and to always look for the good in them as we hope they will do the same for us so that in the end our imperfections will always be overlooked by others.

It's is what Jesus did all the time – he worked amongst many cracked pots – Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, Matthew the tax collector just to mention three – and he always was wise and generous enough to see the good in them. He never condemned, never took people for granted, was always ready to overlook their imperfections – and he naturally had the wisdom to use them for good.

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to live wisely, making good use of every opportunity since times are evil. The inference is that unless we are consciously walking positively and wisely in God's direction, we human beings can easily find ourselves swallowed up into the foolishness of living contrary to God's will. Wisdom is seen as living in inner peace and harmony with God. God's wisdom leads his followers into a life of order so that what we offer to God should be worship with reverence and awe. And notice one other thing. We need to learn to walk as disciples, rather than as experts, experts who feel offended every time they are instructed or challenged.

Experts feature strongly in our reading from Luke where we learn that the law was precious and at the foundation for the Jewish people of their witness as the people of God. The religious leaders' status and learning was an enormous block to their wisdom, not least because they felt themselves to be, more or less, perfect. They had not learnt the lesson that real wisdom is different from knowing lots of facts. Jesus hasn't come to do away with it but to fulfil it. Just

as the donkey's thirst is quenched on the Sabbath, so God longs to refresh and heal – whatever day it is. So, Jesus demonstrates the law's true meaning. We too must follow in the distinctive way of Christ, allow ourselves to be led to living water and healed, and then get up, straighten up, like this woman, and praise God.

So, when we catch ourselves thinking that we are perfect, that we don't really need to learn anything new, then maybe we need to remember the story of the cracked pot, a story which reminds us that we are none of us perfect; but that wisdom should teach us to use our flaws, our imperfections to serve God and other people as best we are able. The world needs wise people so much – those who are good to go to when we want to talk thing over, though not necessarily the people who will tell us exactly what we should do. For truly wise people are those who will really listen to us – to how we are feeling inside as well as what we are saying – and will just walk alongside us as friends. This is summed up in these well-known words from the French author Albert Camus:

“Don't walk in front of me – I may not follow.

Don't walk behind me – I may not lead.

Walk beside me – and just be my friend”.