

The challenge of a cup of water

Welcoming God, giving space for creation to return your love: make us apostles of the open table, a place of hospitality to challenge the world with the gift of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, who offered himself for us.

A Collect for Proper 8A, Prayers for an Inclusive Church

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
 Jeremiah 28:5-9; Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18; Matthew 10:40-42
 JULY 2, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY
 EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL
 Los Olivos, California
 THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 10:40-42

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

What goes into the act of giving a cup of cold water?

A cup, water, handing it to someone.

It seems simple, doesn't it? Jesus implies it is simple in what we hear in this reading from Matthew's gospel.

There are some unspoken assumptions, of course: that a cup has been made, that it is in one's possession, that there is water and that it is potable. And there's the willingness and ability to hand it over – that one sees and has the inclination to make the gift and

that this act of generosity is met by someone receiving the cup, receiving the gift, willing to connect....

I have always felt that handing out water is simple.

And that it makes sense in the way Jesus speaks about it.

It is hospitality at a very basic level, demanding very little of us and, at the same time, providing an element that humanity absolutely cannot live without. Organic life absolutely requires water. We see that simplicity and the essential nature of water also in Baptism.

And, yes, I see a link in offering a glass of water and in being people who have a core identity as the baptized.

Do you know that one way St. Mark's is known to many people is as a place where they got or could get a cup of water?

It's something "we" do here – meaning it is something a very small group of us do here – we set out water on hot days so people who are thirsty can drink.

What does it involve? Some large vessel, ice, water, cups, carrying, organizing, carrying away trash. There's a continuous but completely "doable" physical aspect of it, combined with a little bit of thinking, having to remember to refill, to clean up. It engages us, the two or three people who take on this task, as human beings. We have to do something for it to happen.

It also involves people coming across it. For some, it seems like a mirage, this big vat of icy coolness just sitting there waiting for them. It seems too good to be true....

Other people probably never see it – just walk by.

So some people receive the gift, some don't.

Occasionally it's empty.

On some hot days it just isn't there – one of us didn't get around

to putting it out or were otherwise occupied.

But the idea is just what we see here in what Jesus is saying: it's basic hospitality.

And in basic hospitality is not just a superficial welcome, but a deeper embrace and, in fact, an embrace that is not ours but is God's presence, God's compassion encountering individual human beings in the very simple ordinariness of earthly life – flowing from God, through us, to others who are our sisters and brothers in a common humanity (a common humanity that it is becoming increasingly and disturbingly more popular to deny).

With a cup of cold water we repudiate what came to be definitive about the Christian religion and from which we are just beginning to recover: a Christianity that was defined by thinking about God in a certain way, building up libraries of printed books that detail in infinitely minute ways, certain verbal arguments about ideology to which true Christians needed to assent.

The world and many Christian people have wearied of that static, impotent, theoretical "Christianity" and have rejected it.

Instead, the life of God is to be both experienced and expressed, which is the core

expression of the life of Jesus. When Jesus said: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you,” he was speaking of *doing* the work of love, of actually carrying the water, pouring it out, making it available, not sitting in a chair emoting love or thinking about love.

There are other dimensions to this matter of the cup of cold water. Among them: sometimes the cup of cold water is *for you* or *for me*. Will we drink it? Even if it comes from an unexpected hand?

My sense, increasingly, is that in acting generously in the world, one becomes attuned to the whole breadth of generosity that is sustaining the world and our lives all of the time.

And so, for us as a parish, these things like having our doors open, completing the small amount of work needed to make our commercial kitchen available to our wider community that is beset with food insecurity for many, driving for Meals on Wheels, participating in our SYV Food Rescue and any number of other similar, small and large things that can emerge from our awareness and thought, are of the essence of being in the presence of God, in the presence of love in the world.

This sort of compassion is learned over time, as our prayer

and our action more and more reshape us in the likeness of Christ.

In the hideously polarized rhetoric of our country and our world, I’m increasingly convinced that only this sort of reshaping of human lives, our lives, through concrete service and active caring, born in the heart of God, is our only hope, our only path to the future.



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