

The Cup of Life
John 15:1-5
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
March 1, 2020
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is the season of 40 days leading up to Easter. It is a time set aside by the church for us to delve more deeply into our relationship with God, to examine ourselves honestly in the presence of God, and to seek God's help as we strive to move from sin to faithfulness. Lent offers us a time to be honest about our weaknesses as well as our strengths...a time to become more of what God has created us to be.

This year as we journey through Lent together, our sermons are going to focus on the image of the cup. Joyce Rupp, a member of the Servite community who is known for her books as well as retreat and spiritual leadership, wrote a book called *The Cup of Our Life: A Guide for Spiritual Growth*. And we are using that, not only for our Spiritual Life Groups, but as a resource in worship as well. So, each week during this season we are going to examine an aspect of the cup as a spiritual teacher.

In the introduction to her book, Joyce Rupp writes this, "I have found the cup to be a powerful teacher for my inner life. The ordinariness of the cup reminds me that my personal transformation occurs in the common crevices of each day. The cup is an apt image for the inner processes of growth. The cup has been a reminder of my spiritual thirst. As I've held it, filled it, drunk from it, emptied it and washed it, I've learned that it is through my ordinary human experiences that my thirst for God is quenched. In the cup I see life, with its emptiness, fullness, brokenness, flaws and blessings.

"A cup is a container for holding something. Whatever it holds has to eventually be emptied out so that something more can be put into it. I have learned that I cannot always expect

my life to be full. There has to be some emptying, some pouring out, if I am to make room for the new. The spiritual journey is like that – a constant process of emptying and filling, of giving and receiving, of accepting and letting go.

She goes on to say, “The cup has taught me many valuable lessons for my spiritual growth. I have learned that my life holds stale things that need to be discarded and that sometimes my life feels as wounded as a broken cup. I have learned that I have flaws, chips, and stains, just as any well-used cup may have, but that these markings of a well-traveled life need not prevent me from being a valuable gift for others. I have learned that the contents of my life are meant to be constantly given and shared in a generous gesture of compassion, just as the main purpose of a cup is to have its contents given away. I have especially learned gratitude for all those moments when the unexpected has transformed my life into an abundant cup of blessings.”¹

What better image to use during this Lenten season as we take time to explore our lives with both the strengths and weaknesses, successes and flaws that are a part of them?

So, let us think together about this image and what it has to teach us.

Webster defines a cup this way: “A small, bowl-shaped container for beverages, usually with a handle.” Most basically, that is what a cup is. However, as we use this image to talk about our spiritual lives, I would word it differently. I would say that a cup is a container of life.

Just as a cup on our table might contain water – that which we need to sustain our lives – we are invited to become a cup, a vessel, a container, which invites and welcomes the presence of God.

And, just as the cup is able to receive that which is poured into it, we are called to be ready and willing to receive that which God would pour into us. Just as the cup is able to be

¹ Joyce Rupp, *The Cup of Our Life* (Notre Dame, IN, Ave Maria Press, 1997), 11-12.

filled and also then to give away that which fills it, we are called to be ready and willing to give away that which God gives to us. We are called to be cups of life – cups which both hold and share the life God gives us.

You will notice here in worship that we will add a different cup to the table each week – one that represents the aspect of the cup that we are dealing with that day. So today the cup that we chose is not a mug, but a chalice.

Because what is the chalice if not a container of God's presence and an invitation to receive life? Think about it. As we gather each week at the table, we are reminded that Jesus took the cup and offered it to his disciples telling them that it was offered as a covenant made in his blood. Each week as we gather, we remember and celebrate that death was not the last word for Jesus, but that resurrection occurred, that new life was given to him, and to us. And so today we placed this cup on the table as we begin to understand that the source of our life truly is God and that we are given the gift of receiving life from the divine.

So, how do we do that? Well, let's remember the words of scripture: "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."²

If we are to truly be vessels which contain, which receive, which share the presence of God, then we must first be connected with God. And this is not an occasional connection. This is not about occasional church attendance or periodic scripture reading. This is an ongoing, everyday, every moment relationship. To be connected with God is not something we are to do sometimes. It is not about when it's convenient for us. Remember the image of the vine and branches. The branches do not get to detach and reattach themselves at will. If they detach, they

² John 15:4-5, NRSV.

die. Instead they must remain attached to the vine; the same food and water that runs through the vine must run through the branches as well.

So it is with us. If we are to truly be containers of God's presence then we do not have the luxury of detaching and then reattaching to God at will. Rather in order to be who we are created to be, we must remain connected to God at all times. We must allow the same life that flows through God to flow through us. This means we must strive to live from the heart of God.

If we are really open to being containers of God's presence – think of the difference that it would make. After all, who is God? God is loving. God is forgiving. God is gracious and slow to anger. God is one who gives second chances many times over. God is just – which doesn't mean one who punishes, but one who has compassion. God has a heart for the poor and oppressed. God is one who believes in our ability to be faithful.

If this is who God is, then it should also be who we are. Yes, if we are to truly be containers of God's presence...if we are to truly be cups which hold life...if we are to truly be connected to God, then the very things which flow through God must and will flow through us.

This is the invitation of Lent. The invitation is to rid ourselves of the things that keep us separated from God, to rid ourselves of the things that get in the way of our relationship with God and to open ourselves up to receiving God's presence and thus reflecting God's heart.

And remember the way to do this is to deepen that relationship, to remain in constant contact and connection with God, the giver of our life. Remember, God wants to make a home in you. God promises to be with you in all times and all places, through all things. Our invitation today and each day is to open ourselves to that presence...to become aware of the ways that God is with us, of the presence of God within us...to reflect that presence to others.

Just as our coffee mugs, drinking glasses and the chalice at communion offer us refreshment, may we be open to being vessels of God's presence that we may offer refreshment and give life to others. Amen.