

The Open Cup
Psalm 81:10 - 16
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
March 8, 2020
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

As a teenager I did a lot of babysitting. And most times things went without incident. But one beautiful summer day I was babysitting for a little girl named Leah and one important thing did not go smoothly. When I arrived Leah and her dad were home. Because the weather was so beautiful she and I went outside, exiting through the open garage door. We played out front and then headed into the back yard. When her dad left he hollered “goodbye”, pulled out of the driveway, and, as was his usual practice, reached for the garage door opener, inadvertently locking us out. It was a little while before we even realized it. When we made our way back around front my heart sank as I saw the closed door. As an act of hope I tried the other doors – there were three – and all were locked. I even tried the windows, but again, they were locked. Finally, as we did in the pre-cell phone days, I went to the neighbor’s house where we were able to use the phone and have someone come home to let us back in.

As Joyce Rupp writes, “Most everything needs to be opened for it to serve its purpose. Clothes need to be opened before we can put them on and receive their warmth and protection. A book requires opening before the contents can be shared. A house has to have a door or window opened before it can provide us shelter. A cupboard door must be opened before the contents can be retrieved.”¹

And, it isn’t only about clothes and books and doors, but Rupp goes on writing, “The same holds true for our spiritual self. Being open is a prerequisite for spiritual growth. In order for God to enter our lives fully, we must be ready to receive. The door to our inner self must be

¹ Joyce Rupp, *The Cup of Our Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1997), 32.

wide open. Our mind and heart need to be receptive so that we can hear and receive what God is offering us. God needs openings in our lives in order to, ‘get through to us,’ to communicate with us, to nourish us, to stretch us toward greater growth, to revitalize and renew us with love.”²

We talked last week about the idea of ourselves as “cups of life” – containers for the presence of God – those who both receive and then share that presence. Today, as we continue to look at the image of the cup, we are reminded that in order to be those who are filled by God, in order to be those who hold the presence of God, those who share the presence of God, we must begin by being open and ready to receive.

So today we have added a new cup to the table – you see it on your bulletin and the screens as well. It is a cup whose widest part is the opening. Rather than having a narrow opening that can only receive little, this cup is wide at the top – open and ready to receive what is offered. The openness of this cup also makes it more able to share that which it receives.

The verses we read from today’s psalm began, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.”³ And then in verse 16 we read, “I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”⁴ Now these words actually come around a lament from God – a lament that says that the people would not listen to God’s voice, would not receive what God was offering, but instead chose their own way, their own struggles and their own punishment.

How often are we like that? How often does God want to give to us only to have us closed off, refusing to listen, refusing to receive? And yet God says to us, “Open your mouth and I will fill it...I would feed you with the finest of wheat, and with honey from the rock I

² Rupp, 32

³ Psalm 81:10, NRSV.

⁴ Psalm 81:16, NRSV.

would satisfy you.”⁵ I hear these words and I see images of baby birds waiting in the nest for their parent who is bringing back their food. In that same manner, we are called to open our hearts, our minds, our souls, our whole beings, that we may be ready to receive what God offers.

But sometimes we seem to struggle and resist being ready to receive. So, what is it that keeps us from being open? What is it that gets in our way?

Sometimes we are too full of other things. Sometimes even though we say we want God to fill us, we won't let go of the things that occupy our time, our thoughts, our energy.

Sometimes we are so consumed with busyness, with stuff, with success, with schedules that without even realizing it, we don't leave room for God. Sometimes we are so overwhelmed by feelings of pride or stubbornness, or even unworthiness that these feelings close us off from God.

So, in order to be open to God, we must first examine our lives and get rid of those things that are getting in the way. Just like a cup needs to be emptied before it can again be filled, we too need to be emptied before we can receive the filling that God wants to give. And what better time than Lent to examine ourselves – after all that's what this season is for. What better time than now to look at our lives, to be honest about what things are consuming our attention, to discover what things are keeping us separated from God, and to sift through, getting rid of those that take up space we would rather give to God.

The reality is that we live lives that are often full to overflowing. And much of the time we don't even realize what things get in the way of our relationship with God. However, sometimes it's not just that we are full and don't realize it – sometimes there are things filling our lives that we don't want to let go of – sometimes we don't want to be emptied and receive new things. Sometimes we are filled up with vendettas, with hurt, with anger, with hostility,

⁵ Psalm 81:10, 16, NRSV.

with our way as the only way – sometimes we are so filled up with these things and unwilling to let go of them.

And again, we are reminded of this season of Lent. This time for self-examination is time to become more aware of what we carry inside ourselves and how we live. It is a time to become more aware of those things that we don't even realize have interfered in our relationship with God. It is a time to become more aware even of our sin that prevents us from being open to God. And when we decide that we are willing to let go – to let go of whatever gets in the way whether it is simple busyness or hatred toward our neighbor – then we carve out a place inside ourselves that God can fill.

And don't let me fool you into thinking this is easy. Because, even though it is worth it, this means taking a risk. And sometimes even after we have honestly examined ourselves, even after we know what it is that fills the space that God wants, sometimes it's that we are too scared to take the risk and be open. Just think – if doors are left open, people can come in; if we open a new book – our ideas might be challenged. In the same way, if we open ourselves to God, we must face the very real possibility that God will challenge some of our thinking, some of our living. We must face the very real possibility that God will ask us to be present with people in new ways, perhaps even some people we've refused to build relationships with in the past. The reality is that allowing God in, making room for God, not only means that we might be changed, but most certainly means that we *will* be changed. It is a risk, but worth it. And after all, that is the challenge of our faith – to be open to God in ways that allow us to be shaped, not into who we choose to be, but into who God creates us to be which is certainly better than anything we could ever imagine.

Just as God spoke to the people of Israel and offered them the challenge to set aside other things and to open wide that they might receive what God was offering, so that challenge is given to us. It is the challenge to become an open cup, ready and willing to receive all that God offers. It is a challenge to become an open cup, ready and willing to share what God gives us in generous portions. It is the challenge of this season as we grow in faith...the challenge to look deep within and to discover that which fills us...the challenge to discard, to empty out that which gets in the way of our faithfulness to God...the challenge to be an open cup ready for God's filling...the challenge to take the risk and to receive that which God will give.

“Open your mouth wide and I will fill it,” says God. May we be open, for when we are, we will be filled. Amen.