

The Cups of Our Lives

The Empty Cup

This morning we're borrowing an image from Joyce Rupp's book "The Cup of Our Life: A Guide for Spiritual Growth." It's the image is a mug or cup. It's a simple vessel that can be filled or emptied, whole or chipped, open and ready, or turned upside down.

I hope you brought your favorite cup to worship and that it's empty. If you don't have your favorite mug, focus on the image on the screen.

Now hold your empty cup in your hands. Notice the space within the cup. Now think of the space within yourself. It is filled with the Divine Presence. Draw near to this Loving Presence. Let this Loving Presence permeate your whole being. Listen to God say to you: "I am with you." (silence)

The Living Cup

I know a cup or mug is an unlikely teacher for our relationship with God, but there are some things we can learn about our faith from it.

The first lesson is that God believes each and every one of us is exceedingly loveable and we should believe it too.

Just as our cups are formed and shaped, God forms us out of love. Just as our cups are held in careful hands, God holds us in loving hands. Just as our cups are filled with refreshment, God fills us with the transforming light of love.

Take your favorite cup and hold in your hands. Notice its style, shape, color, size. Now be aware of yourself as a cup held in God's hands, created out of love, one of a kind, unique. Hear God speaking Isaiah's words to you: "*I have called you by name, you are mine. You are precious in my sight and I love you.*" (Isaiah 43:1)

In silence give thanks to God for creating and loving you as you are. (silence)

Mugs and cups, like we humans, come in different shapes, sizes, and colors. But despite the differences, they're made to be containers for liquid. A cup reminds us that we were created to be containers, not for coffee or hot chocolate, but God's Divine Presence. As the Apostle Paul says, "*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*" (1 Cor. 3:16)

Remember, sisters and brothers, you are filled with God's Spirit. You are a container of God's divine presence. Focus on God's loving presence in you. Listen to God say, "You are mine." (silence)

The Open Cup

We know most things need to be opened to serve their purpose. A present needs to be opened before we can enjoy it. A book requires opening before its contents can be shared. A window must be opened before we can feel the breeze.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. Being open is a prerequisite for spiritual growth. For God to enter our lives fully, we have to be open and ready to receive.

In his letter to Philippians, Paul uses a special word for opening. It's "kenosis" which means "self-emptying". Paul writes: *Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. (Philippians 2:5-7)*

One of the first steps to being open spiritually is determining what must be emptied to make room for something new. Many things cause us inner clutter – anxiety, resentment, harsh judgments, self-pity, mistrust. Things like negative thoughts, useless fears and worries, and to do lists. All of them take up valuable space that could be open to God's love and hope.

In silence ponder what things in your life are causing inner clutter. What clutter do you need to empty to be open to God's new blessings? (silence)

Now look into your cup. Imagine the clutter there. Lift the cup and turn it sideways. Symbolically empty out the clutter from your inner life. Now turn the cup back up and enjoy the freedom of your open cup. Invite God to fill your openness with love and grace. (silence)

The Broken Cup

With frequent use, our cups acquire chips, cracks, and stains. The same is true of us. The longer we live, the more chips and scratches our bodies and spirits carry. A genuine relationship with God – and with other human beings - requires that we stop trying to hide the truth of who we are, flaws and all.

Hold your cup in your hands. Notice any imperfections. Close your eyes and picture your imperfect self in God's hands. See God observing how you look on the inside and the outside. Let God see your blemishes and your faults. Hear the words of the psalmist: *"For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am wonderfully made."* (Psalm 139:13-14) (silence)

When a cup is broken, rather than just chipped, it reminds us when hurts, wounds, pains, grief, and adversities invade our lives and change us. The pain may knock us over, like a cup on its side. We may feel like all our hope has been drained out of our lives and we may doubt if it can be put back together. But God is with us in our brokenness.

Take your cup and lay it on its side. Ask God to remind you of a time of brokenness in your life. (silence) Know it takes time and careful mending for a broken cup to be used again. Even with healing, scars remain. Yet God can use our scars to bring light to others. As you visualize a deep sorrow, remember it's often through our broken places that God's light shines for others.

Macrina Wiederkehr put it this way: "The most helpful discovery of today has been that right in the midst of my sorrows there is always room for joy. Joy and sorrow are sisters; they live in the same house."

Set your cup upright and imagine a deep sorrow is still there in the cup. Now call to mind a deep joy and visualize it in the cup as well. Let these two be intermingled into oneness. Hold the cup to your heart as you hear Jesus' words, "*You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.*" (John 16:20) (silence)

The Blessing Cup

Paul asks about a well-known cup in I Corinthians 10:16 - "*Isn't the cup of blessing that we bless, a sharing in the blood of Christ?*" This cup of blessing, the cup of love in our communion, comes from the Jewish Passover rite. This cup is blessed, and it holds a blessing. It holds the gift of life.

In Hebrew scripture, a blessing is something that communicates divine life. Blessings were given for a variety of purposes: to invoke divine care; to pray for someone; to regard another with favor; to bring happiness; to guard, preserve, protect and keep safe, to encourage another. To bless is to bring the touch of God to another by our presence and actions.

Many people have blessed our lives. Most are probably unaware of what they have done, unless we've thanked them. Take a moment to look into your cup and think about some of the people who have blessed your life. (silence)

Our cups are brimming over with the blessings of God. As Joyce Rupp writes, "When I... reflect upon the gifts I have in my life, I realize that the generosity of God is beyond my comprehension. I could (never) earn all of these gifts that are freely and lavishly given. I marvel at the gift of my inner and outer life. I am astounded at the daily guidance I receive. I am in awe at the way the world works and at how the intricate human body restores and renews itself. I look at the universe and wonder who this Creating Power is to be so generous with colors, shapes, patterns and designs. I remember the wonderful people who have come into my life, each with a unique gift to share with me, and I know without a doubt that through them I have been touched by Divine Love."

Hold your cup within your hands. Picture all of God's blessings filling your cup to overflowing. In silence, give thanks to God for the blessings of people in your life and the blessing of God's unconditional, extravagant, love. (silence)

The Serving Cup

We've reflected on being living cups of God's presence. We've emptied our cups and opened ourselves to God's Spirit. We've examined both the sorrow and joy in our brokenness. We've given thanks for God's overflowing blessings. We've shared God's cup of salvation and bread of heaven in communion. We've done all these things not just to draw closer to our Creator and to deepen our faith or grow spiritually. We've done these things so that we may be enthused and empowered to be God's living, open, broken cups of blessing in the world.

Jesus said, *"I assure you that everybody who gives even a cup of cold water to these little ones because they are my disciples will certainly be rewarded."* (Matthew 10:42) Giving a cup of cold water to one of these little ones. It seems like such a small, insignificant act. You'd think God would require something bigger, something more. We're not sure who these little ones are. But they're probably the most vulnerable in Matthew's community.

How do Jesus' words translate into our lives? A hug to someone who is hurting? A listening ear, an encouraging word, a helping hand? Volunteering at the food pantry? Inviting someone to worship with us? Offering your time and money to a charity or advocacy group?

There are many opportunities to offer cups of cold water. And according to Jesus, when we become God's serving cups, when we offer minor acts of compassion, and gentle gestures of grace, no act or gesture is too small or insignificant.

Hold your favorite cup in your hand one last time. Imagine cold, clear water inside. Imagine someone who need your cup of water. Offer your cup with a smile and be God's blessing to that person. (silence)

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