

July 17, 2011

Psalm 23, Matthew 10:40-42

An Overflowing Cup of Cold Water

When we were in Mississippi earlier this month, the temperature was in the 90s and so was the humidity. The news on tv told us that the “heat index” was over 100, which means that it can be very dangerous. All of the experts told us that we needed to drink plenty of water and take regular rest breaks so that we wouldn’t get sick from the heat. It’s possible to get heat stroke and die if you let yourself get too hot, so we were careful to take care of ourselves!

When we took breaks, sometimes we drank water that had been sitting out for a while---on the warm side, but it still quenched our thirst. It was good enough to keep us hydrated, but it didn’t taste as good or refresh us as much as we needed to keep our body temperature down in the safe range.

Some of us were smart enough to freeze bottles of water overnight before we took them to the job site. We also took 5-gallon coolers of ice and water so that we could have cold water to drink. When that cold water reached our lips, we let out sighs of satisfaction. To get a drink of cold water on a hot day when we had been working so hard was a little taste of paradise!

In the 23d psalm, we read, “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.” The time spent with God in green pastures next to still waters restores our souls just like a cup of cold water renewed our strength as we worked in the Mississippi heat.

The psalm writer continues--- “He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. “ I like to picture this scene----being led by God through a dark valley, being kept on the right path by gentle nudges, and then sitting down at a banquet table! People who wish bad things for me,

who would even like to hurt me, watching me eat with God, who anoints my head with holy oil. By caring for me this way, God fills my cup to overflowing!

Overflowing water! Cool, fresh water that quenches not only my physical thirst, but the thirst that is deep in my soul----a thirst for the grace and love and forgiveness of God---all quenched by that overflowing cup that is put in front of me by God! And all I have to do is pick it up and drink deeply! And then goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will live with God forever!

But is that all there is to it? Will I just keep that goodness and mercy all to myself? Will I sit at that table satisfying my own needs while others look on, thirsty and tired, in need of the grace that comes from God alone? No, that cup is overflowing with more than I need, enough to share with others. Enough to share even with my enemies, so that I can obey Christ's command to love others, including my enemies!

And so I imagine the next part of that scene this way---I pick up that overflowing cup and turn and share it with others. I share it with everyone I meet, whether I know them or not, because I know that I am at Christ's heavenly banquet and that Christ invites everyone to come and dine. And as I am filled up by that cup overflowing, I become that cup, filled to overflowing with goodness and mercy. And as I walk, that goodness and mercy splashes on the ground around my feet, leaving a trail behind me. As I share with others, the overflow just keeps spreading out around us, touching the hearts and lives of others in ways I am not even aware of.

I am, WE ARE, the cup overflowing with cold water, going out to a thirsty world, in the heat and troubles and sufferings of the day, carrying the source of healing, renewal, reconciliation, and hope to others. And I don't say this to brag, because I think that this is what all of us, as Christians, are called to do---to take what Christ has given to us, let it fill us up, and then share it with the whole world!

In the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, we read, “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.” This can be a literal cup of cold water, to take care of the physical needs of the poor and needy, or it can be a spiritual cup of cold water, bringing the Living Water, the Good News of Jesus Christ, to those who are in need of the hope found in Christ. Or it can be both. By serving the needs of others, both physical and spiritual, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Jesus fed the 5000 with bread to fill their stomachs and he also fed their souls, preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and bringing liberty to the oppressed. We are called to do all of this in the name of Christ. We are made capable of doing all of this because the Lord has filled up our cup to overflowing.

We are all called to be the Body of Christ together, to serve God by serving others, and we do this by becoming the overflowing cup of cold water, going out to the world in the name of Christ to share what God has given us.

We were the cup overflowing in Mississippi by supporting and participating in our mission there. We are the cup overflowing right now in Vietnam as we support the work of the Good Samaritan Medical Group during their trip this summer. We have been and we will continue to be the cup overflowing in this community as we support Bayside Community Center and feed the hungry in our neighborhood.

We can be the cup overflowing to everyone we meet----as we work, shop, play, and go to school! Christ puts thirsty people in our lives all the time. Be the cup of cold water that they need! Be the hands and feet and heart of Christ. Let God's goodness and mercy overflow out of you, bringing healing, reconciliation, renewal, life and hope to everyone around you, in the name of our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

