

Introduction

28 June 2020

The welcome of baptism is for all God's children. This baptismal gift sets us free from the power of sin and death. In today's gospel, Christ promises that the disciple who gives a cup of cold water to the little ones serves Christ himself. From worship we are sent on our baptismal mission: to serve the little ones of this world and to be a sign of God's merciful welcome.

Prayer of the Day

O God, you direct our lives by your grace, and your words of justice and mercy reshape the world. Mold us into a people who welcome your word and serve one another, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Romans 6:12-23

Sin is an enslaving power which motivates us to live self-serving, disobedient lives. Sin's final payoff is death. We, however, have been set free from sin's slavery to live obediently under God's grace, whose end is the free gift of eternal life.

¹²Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 10:40-42

When Jesus sends his disciples out as missionaries, he warns them of persecution and hardships they will face. He also promises to reward any who aid his followers and support their ministry.

[Jesus said to the twelve:] ⁴⁰Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever 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; ⁴²and 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."

Sermon

Lectionary 13 A – Romans 6:12-23, Matthew 10:40-42

Even a Cup of Cold Water

God's grace, incarnate in Jesus, compels to interact with others compassionately

I've made the same suggestion to several of the congregations I have served, inspired by the Gospel reading from Matthew.

At a local fair, during a holiday weekend, or at some other community gathering in the warmer months of the year, I've proposed that we set up a small booth and offer free, cold water.

No offering basket.

No brochures.

Not even a sign identifying our congregation.

Just refreshing water.

And perhaps a brief conversation who might linger a moment or two.

In every case the idea has been dismissed.

I suspect that getting people to staff the tent was part of it.

That the strangeness of the project made others nervous.

And that some just thought it was foolish.

But so was Jesus.

As the son of peasants from Galilee he believed that he was an agent of God, superior to Moses, Elijah and David.

That he would usher in the reign of God on earth.

That with a word he could change minds, open hearts, heal limbs, restore senses, vanquish demons.

That his submission to a Roman cross would free the whole world from the grip of sin.

That a cup of cold water,
on a hot, dry day,
can be an opening for God.

To the recipient.

And to the giver.

Today we might paraphrase Jesus
by making reference to breathing.

In and out.

In and out.

An "I can't breathe,"
met with less brute force,
and more compassion.

A chance to draw in new air,
and expel the old.

Remember the refreshment that comes
after holding your breath for even thirty or forty seconds,
transfixed on an anxious event or delicate task.

Or coming up out a pool or lake,
where you had been submerged for a while.

Or entering an air-conditioned house or building,
after a heat wave.

Just breathing,
or drinking a cup of cold water
is both ordinary
and life-saving.

Most police officers, and others with some measure of civil authority are good people.

They regard themselves as civil servants,
employed to help and protect others.

But there are some in the United States and Canada,
and in most other places around the world,
who let their authority mutate and distort
into prejudice, violence
and even murder.

Especially as they interact with those who are black or brown;
all who are not of white, European ancestry.

Poverty has something to do with it.

Missed educational or vocational opportunities.

Addictions.

Learned patterns of dependency and despair too.

But at it's mangled, distorted roots it is racism.

Fear of the other.

And power over them.

To whom Jesus asks us to give a cup of cold water.

Or to receive it, when kindly offered by a stranger.

Jesus calls us to provide others with room to breathe; fresh air.

Or a chance to take a deep, cleansing breath when we feel lost or in danger.

The apostle Paul ruminated over such things in his letter to the Romans.

He wanted to encourage them to care not only for each other -
the members of their group -
but for others who need help.

God's love does not excuse us from loving others,
but compels us to demonstrate compassion.

And justice.

That we might live in harmony,
even with those who are different.

Maybe starting with a drink or a sigh of relief.

Such acts of kindness do not score points with God,
and make our reward in heaven any richer.

They are not the price of admission into God's realm of light.

But they are signs of God's blessing to us,
which cannot be locked in a vault,
or stored in a cupboard.

They are gifts too big and powerful to be contained.

They are to be shared, generously.

Gleefully.

Foolishly.

(As the world sees it.)

So that some might see, through us, a glimpse of God.

And that we might give voice to our gratitude,
rather than have it catch in our throats.

We are to love,
even through a free cup of water,
that deeper thirsts might be quenched.,

We are to seek justice,
that deadly strangle-holds might be released.

So that, together,
we might rest,
and marvel at the beauty and diversity of God's whole family.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

A brief silence.

God of companionship, encourage our relationships with our siblings in Christ. Bless our conversations. Shape our shared future and give us hearts eager to join in a festal shout of praise. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of abundance, you make your creation thrive and grow to provide all that we need. Inspire us to care for our environment and be attuned to where the earth is crying out. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of mercy, your grace is poured out for all. Inspire authorities, judges, and politicians to act with compassion. Teach us to overcome fear with hope, meet hate with love, and welcome one another as we would welcome you. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of care, accompany all who are in deepest need. Comfort those who are sick, lonely, or abandoned (*especially*). Strengthen those who are in prison or awaiting trial. Renew the spirits of all who call upon you. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of community, we give thanks for this congregation. Give us passion to embrace your mission and the vision to recognize where you are leading us. Teach us how to live more faithfully with each other. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of love, you gather in your embrace all who have died. Keep us steadfast in our faith and renew our trust in your promise. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Friends of Jesus, come to the table.

Receive nourishment for your journey.

Prayer after Communion

God of the welcome table,
in this meal we have feasted on your goodness
and have been united by your presence among us.
Empower us to go forth sustained by these gifts
so that we may share your neighborly love with all,
through Jesus Christ, the giver of abundant life.

Amen.

Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, ✝ Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.