

Sermon, Proper 8A, June 28, 2020, Jane A. Beebe

“...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.” (Matthew 10:42)

As is his wont, Jesus uses those elements that are essential to sustaining life to show what is also essential to the spiritual life. In today's Gospel it is water. Living beings cannot survive for long without it. Jesus speaks of the “living water” that he is able to provide so that we do not go thirsty. Baptism is the beginning of our connection to that living water: it brings us to new life in God. Today's good news is that even just a cup of this water, given in the name of one who follows Christ, is enough to remind us that this life in God is eternal.

The corresponding passage in the Gospel of Luke is this: “...Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.” (Luke 9:48) And in Mark it is this: “For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” (Mark 9:41) Yet how interesting that in Matthew, the cup of water is offered to “little ones.”

I find this quite wonderful. The sense is that it is good to offer hospitality to children. Throughout the Gospels we hear variations of the following: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me

welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:37) Yet in today's Gospel it is implied that the "little ones" are the disciples themselves. This makes sense. To grow in Christ we allow ourselves to come near to Jesus as children. This is not to suggest that maturity and wisdom are valueless. Wherever we are in our faith journeys, we remain God's children. We are invited to retain the focus and wonder of a child in our approach to God. There is a trust and simplicity implied in that relationship.

My first priest, Fr. Bob Towner (and father of one of my godchildren), related this story a few years ago in a blog:

"I can still remember where I was sitting, in an ugly sectional sofa, in my office at St John's, Mason City, waiting for a scheduled visit that never happened. As the hour of the appointment came and went, I sighed, and began a short intercessory prayer for the no show. Then I simply sat, recognizing I was in God's presence, and there was no more to say. Except that I wanted to remain there for the time being. Looking back it was like a child climbing into a parent's lap. Soon I was introduced to Julian of Norwich, who from her 14th century cell, encouraged me to go back to that seat." She said, "The best prayer is to rest in the goodness of God, knowing that that goodness can reach down to our lowest depths of need." I think this is what it means as a disciple to be one of Jesus' "little ones."

What about this cup of water, though? “...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.” (Matthew 10:42) I was struck by the detail that it is *cold* water. In the Greek, the word ‘water’ is only inferred. It literally says, “...A cup of cold.” This suggests that this water is particularly refreshing; it is essential to life and yet also renewing, restoring. I think of times I have had a drink from a mountain stream or spring during a hike on a summer day. The startling coldness more than quenched my thirst. It was invigorating, bringing me back to life. As disciples we need those times of refreshment. It is something we can offer each other, and those other “little ones” we meet along the way.

We seem to be in a time of near drought right now. I am sure many of you have been taking special care of your gardens. I receive a weekly newsletter from my CSA farm. There is often much wisdom in Farmer Dan’s observations about what is happening on the farm. This week he said, “I have been asked many times this week if I think it's going to rain? Or when is it going to rain? Or will it ever rain again? And for that I have turned inward and downward to a place of just doing and not knowing. What needs to be done? Watering. What needs to be watered? Everything. When does it need to be watered? Now.”

Thankfully Jesus is talking about one cup of water. He says, “...*Even a cup of cold water...*” This level of hospitality and ministry is manageable. It is

portable—and with care, renewable. Yet always it points back to that living water, so essential to our lives. Mother Teresa said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” Notice when you are giving and receiving this week, and in whose name.

The short piece I wrote on fragrance for our latest edition of *Main Spring* now has a part two. At the end of my walk on the bike trail recently, as I approached the parking area, a young woman greeted me and said, “I invite you to breathe in the scent of the lilies. It’s amazing!” Near us was a large pond created by diligent beaver activity over the years. During the spring the lily pads had gradually spread over the water in the pond, making it look almost solid. The bullfrogs often sound like some kind of brass band. That day the lilies had reached full bloom. Even just the day before the flowers had yet to open completely. I did as the young woman suggested and took a long breath. The scent was subtle yet heavenly. The enthusiasm of the young woman I encountered, and her wish to share something wonderful with a stranger, was deeply refreshing to my spirit. She really used the words, “I invite you...” I was able to drink in God’s presence in that moment. I had been nearly back to my car; I could have easily missed that experience. Thankfully I was diverted by this young woman’s child-like wonder. I almost always have a sense of wellbeing after my walks. This time I had more. I had been offered that cup.

“Help me to do your will in whatever work You give. Willing as You will, willing to use very simple things as the instruments of love, as You did: the towel and the basin; the cup, plate, and loaf; willing to do the most menial duties for the sake of love.” Evelyn Underhill