

## **Sermon 8a 2020: God's Gracious Giving and a Cool Cup of Water**

### **Introduction: Scripture that Fuels our Lives in God**

On different days and sometimes even on the same day;

The scriptures in the Bible speak to us, the words touch our souls.

They speak to us to bring comfort and hope to heavy hearts;

They speak to us to bring guidance and direction for our everyday lives;

The scripture speaks to us of God's promises and love for us,

Just as we are;

And they tell us of a life that's really life, the life lived with God and for God.

Now, there are obvious, important scriptures that shape who we are as followers of Christ

Like the scriptures that describe Jesus' death and resurrection, for instance;

Scriptures about the promises of forgiveness and life beyond the door of death

Or scriptures like the two great commandments to love God

And to love our neighbors as the way that leads to real life.

There are scriptures that challenge us to change who we are and how we're living;

And scriptures that inspire us to be our best selves and to serve others

Even in times like these when the path forward is unclear.

But sometimes, the scripture that speaks most boldly, most powerfully in our lives

Can be small or even trivial on the first reading; And yet has such power;

That it can become the core of what we're about as Christians.

When we lived in Roanoke, Virginia, at the start of my ordained ministry;

We lived in a neighborhood where the little houses all had front porches;

There were good sidewalks that made it easy for our sons

To get around safely and play with other children their own ages.

A lot of our friendships outside the church began through the neighborhood kids;

And we also met some interesting people who liked to have fun  
With the newly ordained Episcopal priest down the block.

One who liked to have fun was the Mormon bishop of Roanoke who lived 5 houses down  
And the other was the Director of Evangelism of the large Southern Baptist Church  
Who lived on the next block over.

Now for those of you who aren't familiar with religious organizations  
Who practice door to door evangelism, the Mormon Church and this Baptist Church  
Were committed to converting the heathens in their midst;  
And I became one of their favorite targets  
Or at least as some practice for budding evangelists.

So almost every week, usually on Saturday afternoons, there'd be a knock at the door  
And two nicely dressed young people would appear  
To try and convert the heathen, Episcopal priest.

Now, I admit that I admired their courage and earnest efforts  
But felt like I was already converted enough to be counted as one of God's own;  
But regularly and sometimes together, Mormons and Southern Baptists,  
Would appear on the porch to have a talk with me about God.

For several months I listened to their pitch and asked piercing questions of my own  
And they always left a little disappointed that I was probably going to burn one day.

Then in church that summer, we read this Gospel passage  
About giving a cold cup of water to the little ones;  
A cup of cold water to any of God's children;  
And it dawned on me that these young evangelists were God's little ones, too;  
So, I started putting a pitcher of cold water on the porch to share with them  
Even though I still had no desire to be converted by their efforts.

Well, that little act of kindness changed everything;  
They dropped their guard and stopped trying to change me  
Sometimes they would come by just because they were thirsty and to say hello.

I realized something about God and the life we're called to lead by offering that water;  
I mean giving a cold glass of water to someone, just seems like good manners;  
But for Jesus, for God, it's something much more;  
It speaks to the heart of the Christian faith:  
It speaks of the God who gives us what we need;  
And places a call on our lives to be givers ourselves, to be generous to others.

You see, God is a giver;  
God gave us this magnificent creation;  
God gave His Son for us out of love for the whole world;  
God gives us the Holy Spirit to enliven our souls today;  
And even though we can't touch that level of giving in quantity;  
We can be givers ourselves in terms of quality  
By offering to those around us what they need in the name of God;  
A cold cup of water or the invitation to share in the refreshing waters of life with God.

There are a lot of thirsty little ones in the world in our own day;  
So allow me to talk about three cups of cold water  
That you and I can easily offer to God's little ones and begin to change the world.

### **The Cup of Hospitality**

The first cup of cold water is hospitality; the cup of welcome in.  
Most churches will tell you that they like to think of themselves as friendly;  
Actually from talking to people about their churches, this may be the main attribute  
But it's not always the case.

Not long ago, a priest friend of mine told me about a family  
That almost didn't join the church she is serving because of their first visit there.

They told her that as they came into the narthex, that they smiled at a number of people,  
But no one smiled back; everyone was preoccupied with getting ready for worship,  
Getting children to the nursery, herding the choir and acolytes into place  
Getting lined up and ready for the business of worship.

As they came to the front doors, an usher handed them a bulletin,  
But didn't make eye contact, but simply continued his conversation with someone else  
At the peace, no one turned to them to greet them or even wave to them;  
If it hadn't been for their children who liked the Sunday School, she said,  
They would have shaken the dust of their feet and never come back.

Showing hospitality to a stranger or greeting visitors is what the Gospel is all about;  
Just as Jesus welcomed all who came to Him;  
So you and I have an opportunity to welcome people into this community  
To offer them the cup of belonging, of sharing in our mission and ministry;  
It only takes a smile, a word of welcome, actually passing the peace, sharing your name.

And in this time of physical distancing and the slow returning to in person worship;  
When we don't really have the opportunity to physically welcome and invite'  
You and I can text or call a friend, after the sermon of course, to join in  
To welcome them to the life with God and our mission as God's church.

### **The Cup of Mercy**

The second cup of cold water is mercy, compassion, forgiveness, kindness.  
Most of us have known the mercy of God in our lives;  
That sense that we have been forgiven, even when we didn't deserve it;  
A simple kindness that has come to you and me by God's great love for us  
Even when we weren't paying attention to God in any way, shape or form.

Mercy, forgiveness, compassion, kindness is as simple and as important as  
Letting the mom with two little kids hanging on her in line at the grocery store  
Go ahead of you in line;

As simple and important as helping someone with directions;  
Being gracious in merging traffic and letting the other car in.

But the cup of mercy is more than that, too;  
There are people in all of our lives, friends and especially family  
Who need a cup of the cool water of mercy from you and me;  
Forgiveness for something they've done to you or to themselves  
And who have no way back into friendship and love  
Without your willingness and mine to offer forgiveness.

And if you've ever been on the receiving end of undeserved forgiveness or mercy  
You know what a delight it is to your soul and your life;  
And it, too, is a cup that is ours to offer others.

### **The Cup of the Helping Hand**

And the third cup of cold water is a helping hand.  
We are so privileged, most of us;  
We have so much; we really do;  
And we sometimes forget how little other people in this world have.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, Give us this day our daily bread,  
We may be thinking about the kind of daily bread we'd like best;  
While two-thirds of the world is hoping to eat one meal today.

John Bowes, former chairman of the parent company of Wham-O, the maker of Frisbees;  
Once participated in a charity effort;  
He sent thousands of the plastic flying discs to an orphanage in Angola, Africa;  
He thought that like American children, they would enjoy playing with them.

Well, several months later, a representative of the company visited the orphanage;  
One of the nuns thanked him for the wonderful "plates"  
That the company had sent them;

She told them the children were eating off the Frisbees;  
Carrying water with them, and even catching fish.

When the representative of the company explained to her  
How the Frisbees were intended to be used the nun was even more delighted;  
Now the children would also be able to enjoy them as toys as well.

It matters to us Christians that there are people in need;  
Not just because we are nice people;  
But because there was a time when you and I were in need;  
We have been the recipients of grace, both spiritually and materially;  
And God loved us enough to offer us a cup of cold water  
Through His Son and through people in our lives.

Offering the cup of the helping hand is a way we can share God's favor  
With someone else and bring healing and life to the world

### **A Cup of Cold Water Adds Up to Welcome in the Kingdom**

A little piece of seemingly unimportant scripture can become the basis  
For a deeper understanding of God the giver  
And of God's call on your life and mine to offer what others need  
When it is in our power to share it.

We are facing big challenges in our life as a nation and as a world;  
Challenges we've never faced and challenges we are facing anew;  
And for some of us, the challenges seem so daunting  
that we're not sure where to begin  
Or whether our individual lives can actually make a difference;  
To solve the problems and help God build a world  
That is more like God's vision for our lives together;  
Than the world we're living in.

Well let me remind you that small acts add up;

A cup of cold water here; a gracious welcome there;

An act of undeserved forgiveness; the gift of generosity;

Compassion and understanding; a charitable gift; sharing of ourselves;

Will make a difference in someone's life

And some else's life and some else's life after that.

Pretty soon, all these small acts begin to add up

And the refreshment of the kingdom of God will touch our own souls

Even as God is using us to touch the lives and souls of others;

And it may all begin with a simple cup of cold water

Offered to the next thirsty person we meet.

Amen.