

## A Cup of Cold Water

*Proper 8, Year A — The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost*

Good morning, beloved! And let me just say...  
if you made it here this morning, in this Florida heat, in June,  
with the air conditioning doing its level best  
and the Holy Spirit doing the rest  
you have *already* practiced welcome.

You welcomed *yourself!*  
*...out of a comfortable bed and into the house of God.*  
Give yourself an "Amen" for that.  
Go ahead. I'll wait.

You know, I had to laugh...  
when I sat down with these readings this week...  
because the Gospel is only *three verses long. Three!*

After weeks of Jesus warning us...  
about swords and division and leaving family behind...  
heavy things... *hard things*  
we *finally* get to the good part...  
and it's so short... *you could miss it if you sneezed.*  
But you know how it is.  
Sometimes the smallest package holds the best gift.  
My wife Kate will tell you — thirty-seven years now —  
that *the little things...* are what *carry a marriage.*  
Not the grand gestures.  
The morning coffee... sitting next to her chair before she wakes up.  
The "I got it" when she struggles to something that used to be easy.  
The small things... done in love....  
As it turns out... Jesus *agrees with Kate. Imagine that!*

## The Smallest Thing

Listen again to what Jesus says:

*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.*

A cup of cold water. That's the bar. That's the whole assignment.

Now, in our part of the world,  
we know something about a cup of cold water  
that folks in cooler climates don't fully appreciate.  
When the sun is high... and your garden demands your attention...  
it doesn't matter whether you grew up  
in Kingston or Port-au-Spain or Atlanta or right here in Port St. Lucie.  
A cup of cold water... is **not** a small thing.  
It is salvation in a glass.  
It is mercy you can drink.  
Somebody hands you a cold drink on a hot day...  
and you look at them like they've known you your whole life.

And that is exactly the point Jesus is making.  
He **doesn't** say... "*Whoever builds the cathedral.*"  
He **doesn't** say... "*Whoever preaches the perfect sermon*"  
He **does** say...  
whoever does the small, ordinary, human thing  
of caring for somebody else.  
That counts.  
That is the kingdom of God...  
breaking in through your kitchen... through your hands  
*through one cold cup of water.*

## Welcome as a Way of Life

But before we get to the water...

Jesus says something else.

He says...

***"Whoever welcomes you... welcomes me...  
and whoever welcomes me... welcomes the one who sent me."***

Now my brothers and sisters

if there's one thing you understand... *in your bones...*

like *the fire in Jeremiah's bones...* I talked about last Sunday...

it is ***welcome***.

I have been here for a while now...

and I tell you...

nobody ever left coffee hour hungry in this congregation.

Never once.

And it's not just here...

You walk into somebody's home and before you've even sat down

there's a plate in your hand, and it is *full*,

and somebody's auntie is already saying

***"You too thin... eat... eat...."***

You try to leave... and they pack you a container to take home.

This is not just hospitality. ***This is theology.***

***This is the Gospel... with rice and peas on the side.***

Because what Jesus is telling us...

is that welcome... is ***not*** a nice extra.

***Welcome is the doorway through which God himself walks in.***

*When you open your door to the stranger  
you are opening your door to Christ.*

*When you make room at the table for the one who has nowhere to go,  
you are making room for the One who sent him.*

The whole chain... runs right up to heaven...  
**welcome the disciple, welcome Jesus, welcome the Father.**  
Your own front porch is connected to the throne of God.  
Think about that the next time your doorbell rings.

*Or when someone you don't recognize... sits next to you in the pew.*

### **Telling the Truth**

Now I want to bring in our friend Jeremiah for just a moment...  
not to repeat what you heard last week  
but to notice one thing about him... I find *almost funny*.

Jeremiah had the hardest job in the room.  
And along comes **Hananiah**... and I **love** Hananiah.  
Because Hananiah... is the prophet... we all *wish* we had.

Hananiah stands up and says...

***Two years!***

***Two years and God breaks the yoke and everybody goes home!***

The crowd loves it. *Of course they do!*

We *always* love the prophet... who promises the quick fix...  
the easy answer... the microwave miracle.

And Jeremiah has to stand there and say...  
 Gently... sadly... **Brother... I hope you're right. I really do.**  
 But he *knew* better.  
 He knew the prophet *who's telling the truth*  
 is the one whose word... *actually comes to pass*  
 and that *real peace... comes the slow way...*  
 when justice is done  
 when the fighting stops  
 when the famine breaks.

Jeremiah *loved his people too much*  
 to sell them a comfortable lie.

And that, church... *is its own kind of love.*  
 Sometimes...  
***The most loving cup of cold water you can give somebody***  
***is the truth, served plain.***

### Set Free to Serve

And here's where Paul comes in...  
 with that funny... twisty... argument... in Romans.

Paul talks about slavery... freedom.  
 And at first... it sounds upside-down.  
 He says...  
***you were slaves to sin***  
***but now you're slaves to righteousness.***  
 And you might think...  
***Paul... I didn't sign up to trade one master for another.***

But Paul knows exactly what he's doing.  
Because the truth is... *every single one of us serves something.*  
**Every one of us.**

You're going to give your life to *something*  
to money...  
to fear...  
to bitterness  
to the opinions of people who don't even know you or like you.  
The question is never *whether* you'll serve.  
The question is *who*.  
And Paul says...  
Here is the great secret of the Christian life.  
When you give yourself *to God*... you don't *lose* your freedom...  
**You finally find it.**

*Because the master you're serving now... is Love himself...  
and Love... never asks you for anything... that will harm you.*  
***Because the master you're serving now... is Love himself...  
and Love... never asks you for anything... that will harm you.***

***The wages of sin is death...  
but the free gift of God  
is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

***A free gift.*** You *can't earn* it. You *can't buy* it.  
You can only open your hands... and receive it...  
***like a cup of cold water on a hot day.***

## Love, Wisdom, and Courage

Now here at Holy Faith... we have a motto... a mission... a prayer...

***Jesus, guide us in your way of Love, Wisdom and Courage.***

And I want you to see...

how every one of these readings  
is walking us down that same road.

### The Love

That's the cup of cold water.

That's the welcome at the door... the plate of food...

the small kindness done in Jesus's name.

***Love is never too small to matter to God. Never.***

### The Wisdom

That's Jeremiah...

who had the *courage to tell the truth...*

instead of the comfortable lie.

***Wisdom*** is knowing...

the road home is long... but walking it anyway

*trusting God for what we cannot yet see.*

### And Courage

That's Paul...

calling us to break free from every old master

and give ourselves fully to God.

It takes ***courage to be free***, church.

It is *easier to stay in the chains* you know.

But the gift of God is life... ***real*** life... ***eternal*** life...

and it takes ***courage***

***to reach out and take it.***

## A Cup I Gave This Week

Now let me tell you a story...  
because I lived this Gospel... just this week... and didn't even plan to.

Fifteen years ago... I wrote a song.  
It came out of a story a Baptist pastor friend.  
He told me about when he arrived at a new church  
about what it really means...  
to love a people... you don't even know yet.  
I called the song "Are You Willing to Fall in Love with Them?"  
I was proud of it.  
I showed it to a few musicians over the years...  
and... well... bless their hearts... none of them were interested.  
So it sat. For fifteen years... it sat in a drawer.

And then last week... finally... with a lot of help...  
and I'll be honest with you...  
a lot of help... from some of these new tools...  
the Lord has let us figure out...  
I was able to actually *produce* that song.  
Hear it. Finished. Finally. After fifteen years.

I'd like you to hear it now. I'll put the words on the screen.

The story is about a pastor's love...  
but it's also about a parents love. A couple's love. A friends love.

**Are You Willing to Fall in Love with Them?**

He was a pastor working two good jobs  
When the call came in from God  
Give up what you have and follow me  
After all I am your Lord  
So he left the life that he loved so much  
Moved off to a strange new place  
But the open arms of welcome  
hung beneath an angry face

*Are you willing to fall in love with them  
Even though they'll break your heart?  
Can you cast your fears of God's big shoulders  
Find your way when it's so dark?  
Will you show the light of Christ to them  
As they rip your life apart?  
Are you willing to fall in love with them  
Even though they'll break your heart?*

He wasn't the first to be attacked  
Pastors ran right out the door  
But as he stayed and cried to God each night  
They'd cut him to his core  
Till that fateful night they called him out  
There was a motion for him to resign  
And he looked upon the anger there  
And asked God for a sign

So he was quiet, as he held his breath  
heart pounding in his chest  
When he finally spoke, this broken man  
tried to do his best  
he spoke these careful words to them  
It was God's voice he discerned  
The motion wasn't seconded, and so we will adjourn.

*Are you willing to fall in love with them  
Even though they'll break your heart?  
Can you cast your fears of God's big shoulders  
Find your way when it's so dark?  
Will you show the light of Christ to them  
As they rip your life apart?  
Are you willing to fall in love with them  
Even though they'll break your heart?*

Well he's been there now for ten long years  
They smile at his loving face  
And they've come to understand God's love  
Through his amazing grace  
Because he never would give up on them  
However hard they tried  
He just loved them there with all his heart  
Like the Son of God who died.  
He just loved them there with all his heart  
Like our savior Christ, who died

*Are you willing to fall in love with them  
Even though they'll break your heart?  
Can you cast your fears of God's big shoulders  
Find your way when it's so dark?  
Will you show the light of Christ to them  
As they rip your life apart?  
Are you willing to fall in love with them*

Now we hadn't seen each other for several years.  
He's up in Jacksonville... I'm down here in Vero Beach...

But last Sunday night I picked up the phone... and I called him...

and I sent him the song. His song, really.  
And when he called me back... he could barely speak.  
He was choking through tears.  
And all he could get out... the only thing he could say...  
...was ***Thank You. You have truly blessed me.***

And here's the thing. It cost me almost nothing.  
A phone call. A song I'd already written.  
A few minutes on a Sunday night.  
*For me, it was just a cup of cold water.*  
***But for him? It was the whole ocean.***

That's what Jesus is telling us this morning.  
You will almost ***never know***  
which ***small thing you do***  
becomes ***the whole ocean*** for somebody else.

You just give the water. You let God do the rest.

So this week... give somebody your cup of cold water.  
The literal kind... in this heat... by all means.  
But also... ***the other kind.***

The phone call. The word of welcome to the visitor in the back.  
The plate for the neighbor who's struggling.  
The song you've been sitting on.  
Some small, ordinary act of love done in the name of Jesus.

Because Jesus said none of it... ***none of it... will lose its reward.***

And beloved...  
if God remembers a single cup of water  
imagine what he's keeping for a people  
as generous, as faithful, and as full of love as you.

Welcome him in. He's *already* at the door.