

Are We Offering the Right Cup?

Romans 5:1-11 & Matthew 9:35-10:8

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616

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Romans 5:1-11 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Matthew 9:35 — 10:8 (NIV)

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

¹ He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Are We Offering the Right Cup?

Carl A. Boyle, a sales representative, was driving home when he saw a group of young children selling Kool-Aid on a corner in his neighborhood. They had posted the typical hand-scrawled sign over their stand: “Kool-Aid, 25 cents.” Carl was intrigued, so he pulled over to the curb. A young man approached and asked if he would like strawberry or grape Kool-Aid.

Carl placed his order and handed the boy a dollar. After much deliberation, the children determined he had some change coming and rifled through a cigar box until they finally came up with the correct amount. The boy returned with the change, then stood by the side of the car. He asked if Carl was finished drinking. “Just about,” said Carl. “Why?” “That’s the only cup we have,” answered the boy, “and we need it to stay in business.”

It’s difficult to operate a Kool-Aid business if you only have one cup. I want to suggest to you this morning that we sometimes make that mistake in the church.

This morning we are focusing our attention on the evangelistic task of the church. For many persons the word “evangelism” brings to mind a few prominent “cups” from the past. Such cups include, perhaps, a televangelist with slick hair bringing in big bucks by way of the electronic media. Or, if you’re old enough to remember such things, it might be a tent revival on the edge of town where sinners were invited to walk the sawdust trail and offer their lives to Jesus. For those whose memories don’t go back to tent revivals, how about a Billy Graham crusade — or a preacher on a street corner — or the person handing out tracts in the airport?

In some churches evangelism has traditionally meant a once a year special event, or a particular strategy for incorporating newcomers into the life of the church. I want to suggest that, perhaps, by limiting our vision of the evangelistic enterprise to some of these rapidly disappearing cups, we may be stifling Christ’s work on earth and cheating ourselves out of one of the most rewarding endeavors Christ offers us.

The one commandment that Jesus gave to His Church besides “love one another” (John 13:34) was the commandment to go out and “make disciples” of all people (Matthew 28:19). Our failure to take that commandment seriously has resulted in a church that is no longer reaching people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. In fact, a case could be made that we are an enterprise that is rapidly going out of business.

Even worse is the fact that helping a friend, or neighbor, find new life in Jesus gives our own life a huge spiritual lift. There are few things we can do in life that will make us feel better than having someone say to us, “My life is so much better because of you.” That’s what happens when you invite somebody to be a part of the family of Christ. So I would like to focus for a few moments on Christ’s call to be evangelists — those who introduce their family and friends, as well as strangers, to Jesus Christ.

LET’S BEGIN BY ANCHORING OUR CONCERN FOR EVANGELISM IN CHRIST’S COMPASSION FOR THE WORLD.

This compassion is the only reason Jesus sends us out to make new disciples. We read in Matthew 9:36, “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Can you think of a better description of many people today than: “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”?

It is a striking simile. Can you not see a flock of sheep milling around in a pen? Frightened and confused, they stumble blindly, bumping helplessly into one another, because they don’t know which way to turn. How like so many of us.

There is a story by Guy de Maupassant titled “*The Necklace*.” “*The Necklace*” is a tale of a young woman named Mathilde who wishes she was rich and also wishes she was accepted in higher social circles. However, her husband is an ordinary French citizen without the resources to fulfill her dreams.

Finally this young woman gets the chance to advance her dreams when her husband gets the two of them invited to an elegant ball. She spends a huge sum of money and buys a beautiful dress. She also borrows a beautiful diamond necklace from a friend, Madame Jeanne Forestier. The stunning necklace draws many compliments from the aristocratic guests at the ball. However, somehow the worst possible thing happens. Mathilde loses the beautiful necklace.

What is she to do? It was so expensive. Panic stricken, she and her husband borrow thirty-six thousand francs to buy a new necklace so her friend will not find out what she has done. In order to pay back this vast amount of money they are forced to go to such extremes as selling their home, dismissing their servants, working at two jobs, even moving into a slum. After ten years of intense sacrifice, the debt is finally paid off.

One day after the debt is paid Mathilde happens to run into Madame Forestier, the friend from whom she borrowed the necklace. Forestier is shocked by how quickly Mathilde has aged. And Mathilde confesses what had happened — that she had lost the necklace — and what they had been through because of it.

Quite shaken, her friend reveals to Mathilde that the diamonds which she had replaced at such great cost had been fake and that the necklace she had lost cost less than 500 francs, a fraction of the cost of the replacement necklace. All those sacrifices had been a tragic mistake.

What a parable of contemporary life! People frantically slaving for values that turn out only to be paste. People chasing after dreams that only end in heartaches. People worshipping idols that can never bring them real happiness.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds. We need to see that when we try to reach out to people in Christ’s name, it is not because we are merely seeking to build up our church rolls. It is because we believe Christ can help them put their lives in order. It is because we believe that Christ can help them with their family lives, that Jesus can bring them joy and peace and salvation. Evangelism is always

anchored in Christ's compassion, His love for people. It hurts Christ to be watching people make a mess of their lives because they have the wrong values. He wants them to know there is a better way.

MANY PEOPLE TODAY FEEL UNLOVED AND UNDERVALUED.

They feel estranged from other people, and from God. For example, you're probably aware that more people are living alone today than ever before. For some that is by choice. But for many others this is because of divorce or the death of their spouse. Loneliness is a major problem in today's world.

Many young people feel that somehow they don't fit in. We are made conscious of this every time there is a mass shooting, but it is also reflected in the number of people, young and old, who are becoming drug and alcohol dependent. Many young people are taking their own lives. People today are hurting. Does anyone care? Yes, Christ cares!

There is a beautiful scene in the movie Dr. Zhivago. The Comrade General is talking with Tanya, who, unbeknownst to her, is Zhivago's daughter. He is asking her about one of the traumatic experiences in her childhood, a time when she became separated from her adoptive father, a lawyer named Komarov. He asks her, "How did you come to be lost?" She replies, "Well, I was just lost." He asks again, "No, how did you come to be lost?"

Tanya doesn't want to say. She says simply, "I was just lost. My father and I were running through the city and it was on fire. The revolution had come and we were trying to escape and I was lost."

The Comrade General asked more emphatically, "How did you come to be lost?"

She still didn't want to say. Finally, though, she did say. "We were running through the city and my father let go of my hand and I was lost." Then she added plaintively, "He let go." This is what she didn't want to say.

The Comrade General said, "This is what I've been trying to tell you, Tanya. Komarov was not your real father. Zhivago is your real father and I can promise you, Tanya, that if this man had been there, your real father, he would never have let go of your hand."

That is the difference between a real father and a false father, is it not? A real father would never let go of his daughter's hand. That is also the difference between a real god and a false one.

Many people link themselves to false gods — power, wealth, physical appearance, the approval of their peers, stuff. Sooner or later each of these gods betrays us. They can take us only so far and no farther. Then they, too, let go of our hand. Only one god is sufficient in every circumstance in life and beyond. It is the eternal God — the God who made Himself known in Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds. He, alone, understood the real tragedy of a life of empty values, a life with no direction, a life linked to false gods. He “had compassion for them,” Matthew tells us, “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

AND THIS BRINGS US TO WHY EVANGELISM — SEEKING TO HELP PEOPLE KNOW JESUS — IS SO IMPORTANT.

Notice what our lesson says. Matthew writes that Jesus “had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Then he tells us that Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.”

He’s talking about the work of evangelism. He’s talking about reaching out to people and bringing them into His family. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.” That’s who we are called to be — workers in the harvest field.

Can you see that the only motivation for what we call evangelism is Christ’s compassion, His love for the people in the world? Even though there are business aspects to some of the things that take place within a church, we are not a business enterprise at heart. Even though we have bills to pay like any other institution, our main motive for being is not just to generate a more impressive bottom line. Our goal is not to enhance institutional pride. Our aim is not to be the biggest and the best.

There are people outside the walls of this church who are confused, angry, hurting, dying. There are families that are disintegrating, young minds being destroyed by drugs, old folks feeling forgotten. The need is almost overwhelming. Truly the harvest is plentiful.

The question, then, is: where are the workers? Where are those committed to being the body of Christ in ministry to the world? Where are those who will point their family, their friends and their business associates to the One who can satisfy their needs in all circumstances for now and all eternity?

I’m not talking about button-holing people on the street. I’m not talking about an offensive holier-than-thou kind of sanctimonious salesmanship. I’m talking about caring enough about people that you try to help them out of their confusion, loneliness and fear. Let me give you an example.

Catherine Marshall once told about a couple named Mary and Harold Brinig. Mary and Harold moved to Chicago many years ago. They had no friends in Chicago. Soon they were lonely. They were also irritable and unhappy with each other.

While seeking help from the Bible, they saw these words of Jesus: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (John 15:16).”

Somehow that passage became like a light penetrating their darkness. They realized that much of their unhappiness was caused by self-centeredness. They wondered if Jesus was choosing them for some kind of unknown service. They also wondered what type of service they could possibly perform in such a big city as Chicago.

The first person they encountered after this discovery was the waitress who served them in a nearby restaurant. She apologized for giving them such slow service and said she was new in the city and miserable. They invited her to visit them in their apartment after work.

A neighbor who was a widower became the second person they befriended. Soon a dozen people were meeting once a week for conversation and prayer.

Out of these meetings grew a project called “Adventures in Friendship.” Soon scores of people were involved in visiting the lonely and the shut-ins throughout the whole area.

There was an interesting byproduct of this ministry. Mary and Harold became so absorbed in the needs of others that they soon forgot their own troubles. Their lives became immeasurably richer and fuller.

Probably Mary and Harold would never have thought of what they were doing as evangelism. It didn't fit the cup that they pictured when they thought of that word. They were simply showing compassion to people in need — in Jesus' name. And, my friends, that is what the Church of Jesus Christ is all about.

That's one of the reasons we are opening up the various rooms in St Paul's for all kinds of things not normally thought of as being a part of a church. It's so we can build relationships with people who might otherwise never come through our doors on a Sunday morning because they don't know us. They don't know what goes on in here. They don't even know why they would even need what we have. But by our getting involved in untraditional things with these individuals, it gives us the chance to build a relationship with them that might make it easier for them, and for us too, as we each seek to grow in our relationship with God.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds. Harassed and helpless, they were like sheep without a shepherd. And there were so many of them. Just like today. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.”

Where are the workers? Where are those who care enough to become involved in the lives of others? Where are those willing to take their time to show love to young people and old folks, to the substance abuser and the victims of broken families, to the down and out as well as the up and in? Where are the workers? Christ asks even today. Can He count on you?