

The Cup

Mark 14:32-38; Hebrews 5:7-10

Mark 14:36

"And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will but what You will.'"

Sunday, September 29, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- **Introduction: cup as destiny**

A week from now we will have the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and with that in mind, I wanted to share with you some thoughts I found on the internet regarding the symbolism of the Cup. First some thoughts by a counselor named Melli O'Brien:

A group of alumni, who were very successful in their careers, decided to get together to visit their old university professor. After they all reunited, the conversation of the alumni soon turned into complaints about work, relationships and life.

Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups - porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite - telling them to help themselves to the coffee.

When all of his old students had a cup of coffee in hand, they sat down together and the professor said: "If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups have been taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is, of course normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that can also be the source of much of your dissatisfaction, problems and stress.

It's important to know that the cup itself adds no real quality to the coffee. In most cases it is just chosen because its perceived to be more special or expensive. What all of you really wanted was experience of the coffee, not the cup, but you unconsciously went for the best cups. Some of you tried to get the best cup first or began eyeing each other's cups to see if yours was nice enough.

Now consider this: Life is a bit like the cup of coffee; the jobs, money possessions and position in society are the cups. They are just tools and structures that contain or hold together the current story of your life, and the type of cup we have does not define, nor change the quality of life we live.

Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee. Here is my advice to you - Savour the coffee, not the cups! What you really want is to be happy and the happiest people don't have the best of everything. They just make the best of everything. *

- **Symbolism**

The Cup is something with a rich symbolism. In the days when Old English was spoken, the cup represented a full, rich life. In the thoughts of many, the cup represents our life, or the skills and tools we use to spend the days of our lives, represented by the contents of the cup. In the 23rd Psalm, the cup represents the provision of God, likened to a full water container used by the shepherd to nourish his sheep. But cup also has a different, darker symbolism. In the writings of the old prophets, the cup represented the wrath and judgment of God upon sinful people. Listen to Isaiah 51:17: "*Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out.*" Isaiah

predicted the fall of Israel well before it actually happened, but the religious hypocrisy and lawless behavior would not be tolerated by God forever. As the fall of Israel approached, Jeremiah spoke similar words when speaking of God's judgment on the nations. Jeremiah 25:15: *"For thus says the Lord God of Israel to me: 'Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.'*" Isaiah used the cup as a symbol of judgment for Israel-the chosen nation-and Jeremiah used the same symbol for judgment against the nations. Jesus used the same image for the hypocritical religious leaders of His day. In Matthew 23:23-26, He said, *"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also."* So, the cup and mean the blessing of a rich life, but also of the wrath of God and of the sin and corruption of the human soul, especially when it is covered by a religious veneer.

- **Set the Stage: Jesus in the Garden asks, but leaves it to the will of the Father**

Here we turn to the setting in Scripture. Jesus, about to be arrested, is in the Garden of Gethsemane deep in prayer, and if we consider the passage in Hebrews, deep in very emotional prayer. He asked, if it was possible, that the cup before Him would pass, but bowed to the will of the Father. Cup represented destiny, and I think, in this case, the wrath of God against sinful humanity. Jesus drank that cup and went to the cross. Here's what I propose.

Main Point: The cup in the context of that last night was the wrath of God against sin, and Jesus drank it for us. He took our cup, so we could take His. Scripture warns us to prayerfully examine our lives, that we not be like the scribes and Pharisees, and Scripture also warns us that refusing to submit to Christ leaves us with the cup of wrath before us. But when we reverently, with repentance, take Holy Communion, we are taking Christ's cup, the cup that represented blessing and wholeness and we can do it because He took our cup.

- **Application**

So, the application is to be mindful of this whenever we take Holy Communion, the cup is a symbol of life, but the cup on Scripture represents so much more and we should never forget that we take His cup, only because He took our cup.

- **Conclusion**

The cup symbolizes life, or a rich life or the tools we have to make the most of our life, which is the contents of the cup. In Scripture it goes farther. It represents blessing and the provision of God, but it can also represent the wrath of God. At the fateful night in the garden. Christ took our cup, so all people would have the opportunity to take His. And I think that is what we say when we partake in Holy Communion if we do so with understanding and with a sincere heart.

