

When Your Cup Runneth Over  
Psalm 23; Matthew 13:31-33  
November 15, 2020  
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How full is your cup this morning? Is your cup full and running over this morning, or is it almost empty? Or maybe there is no cup at all. Some people who have been affected by the corona virus and unemployment may have no cup. However much is in your cup, why not allow some of those blessings to spill and flow over to the others? God will take what you have and multiply it many fold. It all comes down to faith.

Jesus knew that his followers would need deep faith based on gratitude – not a faith based in themselves and their own innate abilities, but faith and confidence in God. He had to remind them constantly in their failures and frustrations that it was not about them, but about God who was using and guiding them.

Jesus said in today’s reading, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” In his day, a mustard seed represented the smallest measure known in everyday life. Yet with even that much faith, God would use the disciples and believers to accomplish great things.

Would you be thankful today if you had that kind of faith? Would it cause you to live your life on a bedrock of gratitude, knowing that God was responsible for every good thing you ever experienced in your life?

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Several years ago in New York City, there was a message on a billboard at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. I don’t remember who sponsored it, but it simply said, “If your cup runneth over, spill a little.” I thought of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm.

Where in your life do you have so many blessings that your cup is running over? Is that possible even in the midst of a pandemic? What if those blessings came from your deep and abiding faith that you have formed over a lifetime, and were not dependent on external circumstances?

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I once heard of a Jewish rabbi who was always telling his congregation that if they couldn’t think of at least a hundred things in their life for which they were grateful everyday, they were missing the boat. “Every one of us ought to have at least a hundred things every single day for which we are grateful,” he told them.

What is at the top of your list? Where would you start? Are you thankful for a good hot cup of coffee, a sunrise, a sunset, a delicious meal, a phone call from a good friend, a son or daughter or grandchild? They don’t have to be large. How about a Zoom session during these days with family members you have not seen in some

time? A warm house and a room over your head? Can you pay your bills? Do you have a car to drive to the grocery store? A pet who loves you and is glad to see you when you come home?

I am thankful for simple matters we do everyday and take for granted – like flipping a switch and the light goes on; or dialing your thermostat upward, and the heat comes on. Push the power button on your remote control, and your t.v. comes on; or turn the faucet on your sink, and pretty soon, you have hot water. The list goes on and on. But you get the point.

Are we grateful for these simple things in every day life, or do we take them for granted? If you are grateful for what you have, why not share a portion with the church and others? God has given you everything you have anyway. It all belongs to God. One of the important things God wants to teach us is that when our cup is running over and there are many blessings in our life, we should spill a little, and let it overflow.

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Let me tell you a true story about a little girl whose cup overflowed with blessings and spilled over to many people. In Philadelphia, PA in 1895, there was a little girl named Hattie May Wiatt sitting on a curb outside a large a Baptist church.

She was unkempt and shabbily dressed, and hair matted as tears streamed down her cheeks. The Rev. Russell Conwell was hurrying in to worship when he saw her. He didn't know if he really had enough time to stop, but he did anyway. He asked her why she was crying. She looked up at him and said, "I wanted to go to Sunday school, but when I went in the teacher told me that there were already too many children, and they didn't have room for me."

The minister said, "Oh, we can find a place for you," and he took her by the hand and walked her in. He managed to find a spot for the little girl, who came back to Sunday school again and again over the next two years. She learned many Bible verses, and learned to sing, "Jesus Loves Me This I Know."

The minister was delighted with how the church's ministry had transformed little Hattie May. But things weren't so well the rest of the week. She lived in a tenement in a very poor part of the city. Her parents couldn't always afford food, or go to the doctor if she was sick. Hattie May was always a frail child. Sadly, one winter, Hattie became ill and died from pneumonia.

Later, when the distraught parents were going through Hattie's meager possessions, they found a little red purse that was cracked and worn, it was so old. In that little red purse was 57 cents and a note that read, "This is for a new church building, so all the children will have a place to go to Sunday School and learn about Jesus, just like I did."

Her parents were overwhelmed. They decided to give the note and the pennies to the pastor. The pastor was so touched by Hattie's gift that he went to his Board and the congregation and said, "This little girl has given us seed money . . . like a mustard seed to build a new church and a new Sunday school wing. Let's build it to the glory of God and in thanksgiving for this little girl."

He later shared the story with the church congregation. Each of Hattie's 57 pennies were auctioned. Church members made donations. Checks came in from across the United States from people who heard her story.

Hattie May's unselfish love had paid large dividends. Some of the members formed what they called the "Wiatt's Mite Society" in which it was dedicated to making little Hattie's 57 cents grow. The amount of money raised through these efforts was tremendous, and they were able to buy more property for the church, adding a Sunday School wing.

Hattie's pennies were, in time, donated back to the church, where they were put on display and can be seen to this day at the Temple Baptist Church. It seats over 3,000, and is the source of vital ministry today.

After the church was built, they had money in reserve. An overflow of giving was inspired by Hattie's seed money, and so the church trustees decided to purchase the property upon which Temple University sits today.

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I have a personal reason to be grateful for Temple University. Our oldest son Jackson was very ill when he was in junior high school. We were living in New Jersey at the time. For over two years, he suffered from severe acid reflux, and other GI issues. He had to be home schooled.

The local doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong. So they sent him to a world renowned specialist at the Temple University Medical Center in Philadelphia. Through experimental treatment with drugs that weren't even available in the United States at the time, Jackson slowly improved.

Today he has no symptoms at all. I didn't realize until I read this story that the Temple University Medical Center that treated him was built as a result of a little girl's generosity – 57 cents to be exact.

Well, things come full circle. Today Jackson lives and works in Philadelphia. Recently I told him about this story and how I would be preaching on it. I told him that when things open up again, he should visit the Temple Baptist Church when he got a chance. In one of the rooms, he would see a photograph of Rev. Russell Conwell and Hattie May standing together, with a display of the 57 cents she gave,

along with her heart. In some small way, I said, he might offer a word of thanks for his health. Sometimes our cups runneth over.

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Over the next few weeks, you will be asked to prayerfully consider how you will support the work and ministry of the church in the year ahead. Many of you have said in so many words how blessed you feel because you are a part of First Congregational Church, and that your cup is running over as a result of the blessings. If you are able, give generously. Give thankfully. Give with the future in mind. I wonder what inspiring stories will be told here, and what lives God will change through your generosity when your cup overflows?

I heard someone in the media say how in the midst of the pandemic, they still found many blessings in their life. They had their health, their family, their friends, and their church. Others may not be so lucky. In previous years, they went on to say, they took it all for granted. But today, they are remembering.

With faith the size of a mustard seed, God will multiply your gift many fold. When your cup overflows, it will be a blessing to others. God knows, little Hattie May Wiatt knew what to do with 57 cents. Do you? Amen.

Psalm 23:1-6

1 The LORD is my shepherd ; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever .

Matthew 13:31-33

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

<sup>31</sup> He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup> it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."