

Saint Anthony Park Lutheran Church

14 Pentecost (29 August, 2010)

Luke 14.1, 7-14

Cuppy was a shiny cup, with a sturdy handle, and a smooth and unchipped rim. He even had a little fancy detailing - some gold leaf laced around his middle. He was a handsome cup. He was part of a matched set that included not only a teapot, but also saucers and even a sugar bowl with a cover and a half-pint pitcher for milk. Cuppy and his set lived in the middle shelf - well above the pots and the pans and the daily dishes, but a step below the silver. They knew exactly where they belonged and each dish had a place.

When Cuppy walked, he always went very carefully, to prevent spilling the liquid he carried, because he knew that every drop he lost - every drop he gave up - was a drop he'd have to get back. You see, refilling was a tedious and difficult task for Cuppy, because he'd been taught, when he was just a little thimble, to only trust certain pitchers, spouts, and coffee pots. His father used to say, "Cuppy, pay attention: be careful what you carry and where you end up. The cups in our set are for company, not everyday use."

What scared Cuppy more than the embarrassment and the inconvenience of spilling, however, was something altogether more alarming: Thirsty Mouths. They could come out of nowhere, he'd heard, and drain a cup dry. Even a big cup. Even a deep cup. And Cuppy was not big. Cuppy was not deep.

Some Thirsty Mouths had hard teeth - teeth that might chip a delicate cup's

rim. Some Thirsty Mouths came attached to dirty hands - unwashed hands that could soil a cup's smooth sides, or gnarly, shaky hands that might drop a cup, or angry hands that might break a cup on purpose (if you can imagine that) or throw one out the window. Thirsty Mouths, and the dire things that might happen to a cup in the presence of one, haunted poor Cuppy's days, so he did his best to stay in the cupboard on the middle shelf. He kept out of the way behind the other cups, and not too far from a set of cereal bowls who didn't see much action. It was a lonely life, a little dusty, and kind of boring, but Cuppy was safe, and he knew where he belonged. And that, he told himself, is what matters.

One day, there was going to be a feast in the house - a big one, and all of the cupboards were emptied - even boxes from the basement and the attic were carried out and unpacked, so that the huge table might be set for so many guests. Every setting of every kind of dish was brought out under the lights. The windows of the house were opened and sunlight streamed into the house - and a breeze, too. Everywhere you looked there were bowls and cups and plates - sparkling glass and solid stoneware sat beside porcelain china and pewter mugs. Old coffee cups traded jokes that made some slender stemware blush, and a stack of red plastic cups couldn't seem to stop laughing about something the cut crystal had said.

Nothing like this had ever happened.

It was exciting, but also a little scary, because nobody knew what would happen next.

Cuppy suddenly found himself pulled from the middle shelf. Maybe it was the urgency of the occasion or the excitement of the day, but he was somehow separated from his tea set and set down without his saucer near

a group of apparently well-used cups and tumblers which, as Cuppy now noticed, were a little chipped. Some had crazy cracks running over their surfaces. One looked like it had been glued together twice. Another's handle was broken. Several appeared to be dirty - had greasy fingerprints on them, or a smudge of old lipstick. All these cups seemed to know each other, and they were singing a drinking song and dancing hard enough to nearly slosh out their contents. Cuppy turned his back on them, of course, but stayed nearby. His father's warnings were screaming in his mind like alarm bells. He was horrified, but he was also fascinated to learn what these cups were like.

Just then, one of the cracked cups shouted happily, "Here come the guests!" Cuppy looked up as the doors to the great room opened, and saw a huge mass of people standing outside. Perhaps, he thought, this is "Company" like my dad used to tell me about. Cuppy remembered the stories of well-dressed ladies who came for an hour or so in the afternoon, who held the dishes delicately and carefully, who often remarked on the cups' beauty. They seldom drank, he remembered hearing, because they were "not really thirsty."

Please, he said to himself. Please let it be that kind of party. Please let it be that kind of party. Please let it be that kind of company.

Cuppy's reverie was broken by voices from behind. The other cups had inched forward and were now next to him. "Hey friend," said the one with the missing handle. "I'm glad to see you here. We've got a lot of work to do today. This is the big feast - and *everyone* is welcome. Do you know what that means?" Cuppy's mouth hung open a little, and he offered hopefully, "Company?" The motley group of mismatched cups smiled

broadly, and chuckled kindly. “That’s right! And thirsty company!”

Cuppy turned back to the doors, and took a closer look at the people now streaming in. While there were a few ladies whose hair and pink lipstick were perfect, whose starched dresses and white gloves carried not a spot, they were few and far between. Cuppy saw faces of every color and age, some with eyes that smiled and mouths that turned up in laughter, others whose cheeks were wet with streaming tears. Men and women and children of every color were coming. Some were skipping. Some hobbled on canes, some came coughing, others carried heavy loads. Some were moved in on beds, carried on mats, or rolled in on wheelchairs. Even babies crawled and toddled in among the crowds. And while each of these countless people was different, all shared one thing in common – they were hungry and they were thirsty and this was dinner and they were all invited.

Cuppy bolted.

He ran for it.

Overwhelmed by fear, he ran as fast as he could. Not knowing exactly where he was going, but feeling that the only thing to do was get away from those thirsty mouths, he ran.

But, come on, he was a teacup. He made it about five inches before tripping over a wrinkle in the tablecloth. Cuppy fell with a crack and a splash. For a moment he blacked out.

When he came to, Cuppy found himself surrounded by that strange group of cups and sitting at an odd angle in the middle of a large damp spot on

the tablecloth. He was aware of a splitting headache, and realized with a shock that he was nearly empty. His fall had not only cracked his rim, but had spilled almost all his contents. He felt weak and sick and started to cry.

“There there, friend, we’ll help you. You gave yourself a nasty one taking off like that.” Cuppy felt himself being lifted upright. “Let’s get him topped off a little, he’ll feel better” Cuppy felt the strange cups around him, one by one, tip themselves gently against him. Each gave him some of their own water, and it seemed to Cuppy more clear and refreshing than anything he’d ever held. He felt more alive than he’d ever felt before – but then he remembered: “Oh! What about my rim?” he moaned.

“What? This little thing?” snorted the brown cup with all the cracks. “Consider it a badge of honor, my friend. Besides, we who are a little used are more interesting. “But what am I going to do?” said Cuppy. “Do?” said the other, “You’re a cup! As long as you can still be filled, still hold even a drop or two, and still give yourself away, you’re a cup. We’re not made for display, and we’re not really made for holding something too long. We live for the passing from hand to hand, and the journey from hand to lip. Do not be afraid of the thirsty mouth or the shaking hand. You are part of the gift of the host’s welcome, part of the joy of this feast. Your cracks, your brokenness, this is your pass here – look around you.”

Cuppy looked, and looked closer. He was amazed to find that the people who had come in, some of them so tired and lame and blind and hurting were now sitting at the table with joy on their faces. They were sitting together and there were places enough for every one. And the cups set before them - though mismatched or second-hand or chipped or cracked or

held together with tape and glue - they were proud, and they were filled with new wine. And off in the distance, at the center of this impossibly enormous table, Cuppy could see the host, now rising with words of welcome home. He had a cup in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other.

And soon they were singing.

And Cuppy knew that he was, exactly, where he belonged.

*For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.*

1 Corinthians 4.5-10

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