

Year B 19 Sunday After Pentecost  
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-25  
Psalm 19:7-14  
James 5:13-20  
Mark 9:38-50

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

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Grace and Peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

Who would you accept a cup of water from?

It's the central question Jesus would like both us and his disciples to consider today. It seems like an easy enough question for us to answer. And likely you have already answered this question in your head.

After all, water is life – and we can never seem to get enough of it!

It hydrates us, cleanses us, and renews us each and everyday. And luckily enough for us it is readily available from our taps.

But for much of the world this hasn't always been the case.

Both in ancient times and around the world today many women and children walk for hours and sometimes even days to retrieve life giving water for their families.

And while many of us enjoy the luxury of accessible water, sadly many communities have long lived with water so contaminated it simply can't be consumed to sustain life.

So I wondered if you might join me in imagining something for a moment this morning – put on your imagination hats or close your eyes if you need to – but can you imagine living in a city where you couldn't use the water from any tap for a month?

What would that look like for your daily life?

Where would you have to go to access water?

How many bottles of water a day do you think your family would need to survive?

How long do you think you could afford to live your life this way?

What about if you could not turn on your taps for a year?

What about 6 years?

For the people of Flint, Michigan – this is the reality they have come to face. They have not had drinkable water since 2014 when the city's source became so contaminated with bacteria and lead that it became a public health crisis. A crisis brought on by pollution, poverty, and racial

inequality the community has faced. And a crisis that is not slated to be fixed until 2020 for many of the same reasons.

In a world where the reality of uncertain water security may become more a possibility for us all to have to consider – Jesus' question takes on a whole new meaning for us and for those with whom we share our water.

Who would you accept a cup of water from?

For Jesus' disciples – water was just as central a need as it is for us today.

If only for the simple reason that there is no way water can be taken for granted if you are wandering down long dusty roads with your Rabbi - depending wholeheartedly on the hospitality of communities - you have yet to meet – to share with you their most precious resource.

In moments like these you come to rely on the gift of water from others – not just as a sign of hospitality or good will – but to sustain your very life from town to town.

Yet, this is also why Jesus' question to us and his disciples isn't just about water, our access to it, or even our ability to drink it today. Jesus' question about water is entirely about our relationship with people we are asked to share it with.

Because in this morning's gospel we learn that the disciples still don't quite understand the kingdom of God Jesus is trying to usher in with their help.

In a commentary I came across this past week by Pastor and theologian David Lose – he shared that due to this disconnect - this particular “gospel contains some of the most heart-breaking lines held in the scriptures.”

And I couldn't agree more.

Lines like those shared by the disciples when responding to a man doing works of healing in Jesus' name. A man they tried to stop because he wasn't one of them.

Let's just let that sink in for a second...

The disciples, who as we heard in last week's gospel, had just experienced a teaching from Jesus on the importance of being in service of the last and the least – appear to be overcome by amnesia when they encounter a man who was trying to follow Jesus' teachings by caring for someone who had come to be affected by a “demon”.

And I feel I need to address the appearance of this term before we go any further.

While we no longer talk about demon possession within our communities of faith – in Jesus day it was the common diagnosis for any number of mental health issues and other unexplainable problems going on within their community. And a diagnosis like that could follow someone around for a lifetime - leaving them ostracised, misunderstood, and utterly alone.

And so throughout the gospels we hear and see Jesus, time and time again, compassionately calling his disciples to care for the last and the least.

Yet, none of these teachings or examples were enough for the disciples to truly learn from Jesus leading. Why? “Because that person casing out demons was not following us.”

Notice the shift in pronouns.

Suddenly this act of healing isn’t so much about whether or not its happening in Jesus name – it’s all about the disciples and their place in this story.

Apparently, it is not simply enough to be a follower of Jesus to fit in with this crowd; you have to be a certain kind of follower. One that toes the line, that shares their commitments, and that live up to the disciples’ expectations.

It’s interesting to me that the disciple making this report seems to expect Jesus unwavering approval. After all, he is not asking the question: “*should* we have stopped him?” But rather he offers Jesus a definitive statement: “And we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

However, far from giving his stamp of approval, Jesus quickly corrects the damaging acts of his disciples: “*Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us.*”

Then he goes further by saying: “For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.”

Notice what a small, yet meaningful example Jesus uses. In a mere sentence or two, Jesus has corrected, taught, and instilled what it means to be in relationship and in ministry with others. All by simply talking about “giving someone a cup of water.” A strikingly small gesture - that according to Jesus, is enough to secure one’s reward with God – period.

So from whom would you accept a cup of water?

This summer I had the chance to witness and experience the truth of this gospel through the dedicated work of our New Comer Committee. As with many things in the life and work of our congregation I had been observing and supporting the hard work of this committee from afar. That is until I received an e-mail inviting me to help greet the families as they arrived at the

airport one cool, smoky, summer afternoon with one of the committee's members Michael Chell.

As their plane touched down Michael, my wife Dani, and I greeted the family alongside their Brother Kalid. A beautiful reunion to behold for us all. Dani and I only knew a few words in Arabic at the time – so we did our best to greet the families and welcome them to Canada with our best and repeated "**Marhaban**" or "Hello".

And before we knew it - the baggage claim conveyer started to buzz and down came a great number of carefully packaged suitcases containing the newcomer family's entire lives. So we all sprung into action carrying this precious cargo to the truck Kalid had arranged to come.

Yet, this was not all Kalid had arranged – as what seemed to be a small city of Syrians poured out of the truck to help move all the luggage to the families new apartment – so we joined these new Syrian friends in carrying bags back and forth until all that was left to do was help the family reach their new home.

As we watched the family pile into the Chell's family van – Kalid ran over to my wife and I, taking our airport parking stub from our hand and replacing it with bottles of water for us to drink – and before we could even say thank-you he had run off to take care of our parking.

Later as we joined the family to help them unload the luggage at their new home – Fatima – a mother of one of the new comer family's took a suitcase from my hand and replaced it with a bottle of water. And before I could even explain that we already had bottles of water she said "*Baaraka Allahu Fiik*" with a great degree of sincerity.

Which I understood through our gestures at the moment to mean thank-you.

When I looked up a loose translation later online I found that the phrase can mean something like "Thank you very much." Although as it turns out the literally meaning of the Arabic phrase is quite different.

The first word *Baaraka* means "to bless."

Which is followed by *Allahu* which is "God" in Arabic.

The last word in the phrase she shared *Fiik* means "in you."

And so the three words put together *Baaraka Allahu Fiik* literally mean "I bless God at work in you" or "God Bless you."

From whom would you accept a cup of water?

So perhaps this Gospel lesson is all about water after all.

About the relationships water helps us form and sustain with one another.

About the ways water calls us to share our needs together.

About the ways our troubled waters call us to work for justice with and among our neighbors.

And about the ways we might just learn about God – if we dare to accept and enter into a relationship with our neighbors together.

Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

May this be so among us – Amen.