**St Andrew’s on The Terrace 2 July Pentecost 4 Communion ‘Just a cup of water’**

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| **Psalm 13 : 1-5**  1How long, God? Will you forget me forever?/ How long will you hide your face from me? 2How long must I wrestle with my thoughts/ and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?/ 3Look on me and answer, God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,/ 4and my enemy will say, “I have overcome,” and my foes will rejoice when I fall./ 5But I trust in your unfailing love;/ my heart rejoices in your salvation. |

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| **Matthew 10:40-42**  40“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. 42And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” |

**Contemporary reading ‘This table’ from *Sounding the Seasons*** by Malcolm Guite

The centuries have settled on this table/ Deepened the grain beneath a clean white cloth  
Which bears afresh our changing elements./ Year after year of prayer, in hope and trouble,  
Were poured out here and blessed and broken, both/ In aching absence and in absent presence.

This table too the earth herself has given/ And human hands have made. Where candle-flame  
At corners burns and turns the air to light/ The oak once held its branches up to heaven,  
Blessing the elements which it became,/ Rooting the dew and rain, branching the light.

Because another tree can bear, unbearable, /For us, the weight of Love, so can this table.

Everyone, it seems, carries a water bottle these days. Well, that is they carry their water bottle if they haven’t left it behind in St Andrew’s Church or Centre! Each Monday we come across bottles tucked under a chair or in a corner. There’s a particularly pretty pink patterned one in the North Vestry at the moment. We could have a sale of water bottles for fundraising! So it seems everyone understands the importance of ‘just a cup of water.’ I could sit down now!

Marcus Borg, you’ll remember, includes water or at least thirst for water in his list of the 6 different routes to being saved, redeemed or transformed – all ways he has discovered in Scripture. Do you remember them? - being brought back home from exile, being freed from bondage and oppression, finding light in the darkness, gaining forgiveness for wrong doing, new life coming after something has died within us and, what I want to dwell on today, nourishment to relieve our hunger and thirst.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Thirst is a healthy sign that we need fluids. With the ubiquitous water bottles all around us, I wonder whether anyone ever feels real thirst these days! But, real dehydration is dangerous. It robs cells of the fluid medium they need to get nutrients to the right place, it thickens the blood so it cannot safely transport oxygen and waste around the body, it interferes with clear thinking.

We thirst for things other than water. We might need beauty around us rather than only the brown and black of war zones; human beings need colour and life. We thirst for stimulation and good company; for people who enjoy tossing around the same ideas and seeking solutions. We thirst for love and families which will nurture us and yet let us become the individuals we need to be.

We need food of different sorts also – food to grow brains which think well, strong ethics and good communities. We need the spiritual milk or the spiritual meat of which Paul writes to the little group of new Jesus-followers in Corinth He said to them: “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.” (I Cor 3:2) Our ability to absorb the food for the soul grows as we mature on the spiritual journey.

So, hungry and thirsty spiritual beings as we are, we need to find and be given the food and drink, the water of life and the bread of life which our souls need to grow and develop. We search in books, and around churches for satisfying and filling food which assuages our sacred hunger and for the water which will quench our soul’s thirst. It is a life-long search. We need different kinds of nourishment at different stages of our journey. We heard earlier the psalmist, captured at a desperate moment, longing for such food and drink, longing to be fed and watered by his God.

In the contemporary reading, Malcolm Guite’s sonnet muses on the table – the communion table - which holds for us today special food and drink – elements we have separated out to be our spiritual food. During the Protestant reformation the meaning and significance of the communion, Eucharist or Lord’s Supper whichever it was named in different movements, was a hotly debated topic. Rejecting Catholic doctrines, there was a vigorous search for beliefs to replace that – was Christ really present or virtually present in these elements or was this a memorial meal where we remembered his life and work but did not put undue emphasis on the symbolism carried by the bread and wine?

Guite moves on from the elements in his sonnet to the table on which they stand and have stood for centuries. He is from the Northern Hemisphere, Cambridge, England, so he names the table as coming from an oak tree, for us it might be kauri or rimu. Not only, he writes, are the elements upon the table spiritual food which has been honoured for centuries. But, also, the tree has given us the table. In doing so, it resonates with the ‘tree’ often seen as the central symbol of Christianity – a tree which offers another different way of being transformed – a tree of life which symbolises the forgiveness we may need from time to time and, with its verticality, the spiritual connection between the heavenly and the earthly.

This ritual of this meal, Guite reminds us, is not just a gulping down of food to satisfy physical hunger and thirst. It is a meal redolent of all the people who have brought their hungry, thirsty souls to this moment over centuries – over 177 years in this parish, over 500 years in the Protestant church and thousands more in the Church before that.

So that when we offer ‘just a cup of water’ in aid to a suffering fellow human being, woman or man, girl or boy, trans or cis, it comes not just from the tap or from the goodness of our impulse of the moment, but also with this whole history of nourishing, of feeding and being fed, or watering and being watered, of the transforming of the hunger and thirst of our souls.

I’ve lost count of the people who say to me in different ways how difficult they find believing in Christianity traditional beliefs and then say “I just come here for the community’ – perhaps you are one of those people.

But, this community is the way it is ***because*** it stands in a long tradition of many different ways in which spiritual hunger and thirst have been satisfied.

And the fact that people from this community are able to offer ‘just a cup of water’ and often more than ‘just a cup of water’ to the community which surrounds us, is because they are sustained by this community and this community can do that because this community is sustained by the community which we call God.

The offering of ‘just a cup of water’ is not our bright or compassionate idea of the moment, it has been millennia in the making. Let us fall silent in awe at the idea…….

Let us today reach out for that food and that drink in the grain and grape served here today so we can stretch later out our hands to others, holding out that precious cup of water.

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1. For more about these different ways see Marcus Borg’s *Convictions* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)