

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and from His Holy Spirit, our Counselor, our Advocate, our Friend, forever.

Jesus proclaims today:

*“Whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-truly, I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”*

Whoever gives a cup of cold water...

One of my very favorite stories about Jesus in the Bible is His encounter in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well who gives Him a sip of cold water. St. John describes this meeting in a record 42 verses of conversation. The longest dialogue Jesus has with anyone, ever, in the New Testament, He surprisingly instigates with this Samaritan woman.

Now, you might remember that Jews and Samaritans at that time hated-they despised-each other. Though both ethnic groups originated from the very same ancient Israelites, they did not speak to each other, they considered each other defiled, unlawful and blasphemous, similar to the modern day dissention between Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia or Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

That is why Jesus' parable of what we call nowadays, “The Good Samaritan”, was so shocking to His listeners back then -and should be to us, also, today my friends, as we, too, continue to struggle with centuries old cultural and racial conflicts here in our own country.

The “Good Samaritan” certainly raised some ancient eyebrows in its day. Because, contrary to some popular depictions, the true, Biblical Jesus was not a teller of sweet little moral tales, but a straight-talking, yes, sometimes shocking social activist and political resister, even. That's quite clear in the “Good Samaritan” parable. In its telling, Christ rebelled against all accepted and cultural norms of His day as He showed how an infidel, illicit Samaritan is the hero rescuer of the assaulted and injured Jewish man lying on the sidewalk.

This idea would've been very offensive to Christ's listeners. 'Cause the Samaritan, Jesus reveals, the Samaritan is the one who stopped, the Samaritan is the one who helped-the Samaritan is the one who took the dying man to safety and even paid his doctor's bills. He, the Samaritan, the enemy, is the helper neighbor and the one commanded by God to be loved by all of us, not the established, high-ranking Jewish priest or the Jewish teacher Levite person.

They both viewed, in the parable, right there, close up, a horrific and potentially fatal problem for a fellow human being. They who could've easily helped out the hurt guy, they instead decided to ignore him, the Bible says, to cross to the other side of the street and look the other way, all because that person, who was also a child of God, was not of their own kind! Terrible.

However, this severe cultural divide between Jews and Samaritans did not seem to matter at all to a tired and thirsty Jesus in John 4. Christ went right ahead and radically requested from a Samaritan woman, which was not acceptable for a Jewish man to do, a drink of water from His and her mutual ancient ancestor, Jacob's well.

It did not seem to matter to Jesus, either, that the woman had a problematic past. He just needed his terrible thirst quenched with the physical water she could draw for Him with her bucket.

The woman, in turn, realized through their honest discussion she was thirsty for God's forgiveness-for the peace Christ could bring to her sad, sinful life- "*the wages of sin is death,*" as St. Paul reminds us today, "*but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ, our Lord.*"

When our Lord then offered that despised Samaritan woman His special, spiritual, "*living water*" which He said "*gushes up for eternal life,*" her life changed instantly. Meeting Jesus does that. We are never the same, are we?

And so she cried out, "*Sir, give me this water, that I may never be thirsty again!*"

As He did for the Samaritan woman's soul, Jesus each day, because of how He chose to die on the cross and rise again for the forgiveness of our sins, gives our parched, dry hearts rest and relief through His loving, gushing, flowing, eternal cup of cold water, as our Gospel teaches us today...

On social media I follow a ministry called Cup of Cool Water, located out in Spokane, Washington. For the last 24 years these fine, faith-filled folks have actively provided regular meals, housing, clothing, and life training for homeless and other at risk teens and older youth.

One of their regular patrons at Cup of Cool Water is a young black man named Diamond. A few months ago, Diamond shared with Cool Water's director, whose name is Jeremy, that Diamond had been raped as a child by his own grandfather. Jeremy described on their ministry blog how he was so sad and shocked by this horrifying revelation and how he didn't know how to respond, that he could not even adequately pray with Diamond right then because he was so upset for the young man. Jeremy felt he really let his client, Diamond, down that day.

Later, Jeremy shared his feelings of helplessness for Diamond with a coworker who simply said, "Jeremy, when Diamond was being raped, Jesus was being raped, and Christ felt that little boy's pain exactly how he felt it. Jesus suffered along with Diamond, as He does all of us."

Two days later at church, the director apologized to Diamond for his insufficient response to Diamond's sharing about that terrible childhood abuse.

But, Diamond replied kindly,

"It's okay, man. Yesterday, an angel told me that when I was raped, Jesus was raped, too, cause He loves us and feels everything we feel and so He suffers right along with me. And, I feel more at peace, now."

Jeremy was amazed at the miraculous way God worked such healing in this way for Diamond.

"Hey, so, who's your angel?" he asked Diamond as they walked down the church steps.

"Why, one of my drag queen friends, of course!" Diamond replied.

So, A drag queen disciple.

A surprising Samaritan Savior in Jesus' story.

A real-life repentant woman at the well who left behind her water jug with Jesus and ran home to share His Good News of "Living Water" with her friends and family.

And Scripture shows us in John that "*many Samaritans believed*" in Jesus because of that brave forgiven woman's "*testimony*" about meeting Him.

So, who is your Samaritan woman?

Someone who brought you relief when you were weary?

Have you encountered an unexpected drag-queen -like disciple in your life who helped you when you were hopeless?

Someone who gave you God's gracious good Word at a bad time?

Or maybe you've been the Samaritan, assisting an enemy in Christ's name.

Maybe you stood up to a bully.

Or defied your friends and family for what's right in Christ's eyes.

I hope so, friends.

I hope you-

I hope I-

I pray none of us who confess Jesus as Lord would ever ignore the needy and the hurting we encounter just because it is inconvenient or not politically correct in our environment or culture.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus finishes up his initial Spirit led-"send-off-to-spread-healing-and-save-the-sinners-from demons" speech to His disciples.

Remember, my dear friends, Jesus says, "*whoever welcomes you, welcomes Me.*" This means, friends, family, acquaintances as well as strangers and even our enemies.

And, whoever gives or whoever gets a cup of Christ's cold "*eternal, Living*" water gives His Good News to the world.

And, that's Good News.

Amen.