

Overflow
Epiphany 7C
February 24, 2019
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[Luke 6:27-38 \(CEB\)](#)

[Ezekiel 47:1, 6-12 \(VOICE\)](#)

I'd like to start this morning with an analogy – maybe you've seen this before? This glass jar represents you – the amount of time that you have available to spend on things in your life. Right now, this jar is empty – but we can fill it up with some rocks. I'd say... that's pretty full. We might be able to fit a rock or two more, but about 5 rocks fills this container. Or... does it? If we add these smaller rocks into the mix... and give it a good shake or two – you see that they fill in the cracks between the rocks pretty well! Now, that's a pretty full jar, right? Not so fast! If we add this fine sugar into the jar, we can see that it fills all the gaps even further. We're full – anything more, and this jar would overflow. Now, how many of you have felt full to overflowing with things in your lives? Whether it's the big things, like time with your family – the middle-sized things, like going shopping – or the tiny things, the distractions that fill up the gaps, like watching TV – it's easy for our lives to fill up.

How many of you have felt full to overflowing within the past year? What about in the past month? Last week? Already today – let me remind you, the day's not even half over yet.

Now, there's some fairly obvious conclusions to be gained from this jar. We started with the big things – the rocks that represented time with your family, tricky problems at work, the practice time for your hobbies or skills, and so on. What would have happened if we left those big rocks for last, and started with the sand? There would not have been any room at all for anything else. This is the sort of thing that builds up quickly when struggling with an addiction – there's nothing wrong with an occasional drink, but if you're missing out on the big things in life because your jar is full of time spent at the bar – it's a big problem. The same is true

of gambling – an occasional game isn't a problem, but when your life revolves around the thrill and disappointment of games, it's pushing the big rocks out of the way.

It seems, then, that we ought to choose to spend our time carefully – adding a big rock, and some small rocks, and some sugar, repeating the process until our jar is full – a balance of time. Yet – if we fill our lives with all this stuff – is there room for a spiritual life on top of it? Look at the lives of school kids today: they're scheduled from morning to night with activities, and even after the formal activity time stops, they've got homework to focus on. Is it any wonder that kids – whose schedules are often MORE full than their parents – are struggling with trying to keep a balance in their lives? Is it any wonder that any of us often wonder if we can “make time” for God – whether attending church, or even just in our private lives?

Fortunately, the grace of God acts like a fourth element. Jesus, you may recall, calls himself the Living Water in the Gospel of John. So, what happens if we pour this very warm water into the “already full to overflowing” jar? We see something amazing happen. First, the grace of God, this living water, falls into the cracks left in our jar. It can get into even smaller spaces than the sugar. But rather than leave us feeling stuffed, we see a reaction with the stuff of our lives. Once we're surrounded by grace, the middle-sized things and even the small distractions become a part of the grace we're surrounded by. Instead of empty space, the living water helps us to see everything as a part of God. And the living water keeps flowing into us, even as we are full to overflowing – sharing that love, that grace, that mercy of God almost without thought. We become part of the means of grace for the world!

That image, of the living water spilling out, and bringing renewed life to everything – that's the image that Ezekiel is shown in his vision. A stream of living water, flowing from the Temple – directly from God, in other words – that, when it encounters the dead sea, clears up the water rather than becoming salty. Yet, the edges retain some salt, that can be collected and used for preservation. Trees lining the river burst out into the sweet fruit that the living water nourishes. And their

leaves will be used for the healing of the nations – the fruit to nourish, and the leaves to heal. The trees are blessed to be a blessing – just as we are.

In the same way that the living water in the jar united the spiritual with the physical, so does Jesus teach us that love can unite even those divided by enmity. In one of the most shocking, the most amazing, and the most challenging messages, Jesus tells his disciples to love their enemies. Bless those who curse you, he says. Pray for those who mistreat you. These are incredibly difficult things to do on our own – but by God’s grace, flowing through you, you can be a conduit to amazing miracles. Through showing love for your enemies, the hardness of their hearts will encounter God’s grace, and, with God’s help, will become filled with God’s mercy in turn.

Now, to be clear: these verses are often abused by people in power – in the world and in the church – to tell people experiencing abuse to stay quiet, and continue in cycles of harm. It is a travesty for these verses to be used this way, as Jesus reminds us: do unto others as you would have them do unto you and love your neighbor as yourself. Getting away from an abusive situation is a part of loving yourself – a necessary step in loving your neighbor. And it is absolutely what you would want in the reverse of the situation, rather than cause any additional harm. As the New Testament scholar John Donahue, put it: “A true meaning of the [command to love our enemies] is not acquiescence to evil and violence, but imitation of God’s love by freeing enemies of their hatred and violent destructiveness.”¹

That vision – of God’s love freeing people from hatred and violent destructiveness – is also underlying Jesus’ instruction to not judge. This doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t take a moral stand – but that you should remember that the story isn’t over yet. You and I do not – cannot – know how other people will react to God’s grace. But we can overflow with God’s love, forgiving others as we

¹ John Donahue, *America: a weekly Catholic periodical* (2001) qtd in “A Vision of Radical Social Reversal” by Rex A. E. Hunt on his blog (2007): http://www.rexaehuntprogressive.com/sermon_collection/year_c_sermon_collection/year_c_sermons_-_christmase/radicalepip7c2007.html

have been forgiven – healing others as we have been healed – nourishing others as we have been nourished. That is why Jesus calls us to count whatever we give away as something we have been given. Because the grace of God is not limited to a pitcher of water – but is a stream of living water without end, purifying, healing, causing the dead to live and offering forgiveness and peace to all.

May the grace of God flow through your life. May you be filled to overflowing with the Living Water of Jesus Christ. And may the Holy Spirit guide you to the right place at the right time to be the blessing that is most needed. Amen.