

## **“A Little Sip Community in a Big Gulp World”**

October 5, 2008

Luke 22:14-23

Dr. Kipp Wolfe

As a young boy I can remember during the communion service looking around the sanctuary and watching others as the trays were passed. I was always fascinated to see some people get the little cracker, what we call the communion chiclet, a little bitty cracker, and instead of picking it up out of the tray they would break it in half, then just take half of the chiclet. Often, when the tray was passed, those same people would take the small cup and take just a sip of the cup and leave half or more in the cup, then return it to the tray. Not me. Boy, when they passed the tray to me I took that little chiclet and ate the whole thing. I tilted my head back and drank that cup. Even if it meant licking the bottom of the cup, I got every drop. I think the people who took just a sip have something to teach us.

On World Communion Sunday this is more than preaching to the choir. This is preaching to the People of the Table. That is who you are. That is one thing we call ourselves as Disciples. I know you understand, this but I know also that from time to time we all need reminders of who we are. I know I do.

Recently one afternoon I was sitting at a stoplight and noticed beside me an older model Chevy. I was interested to note the driver of this old Chevy. For the purposes of this story I am going to call her the Flying Nun. She *was* a nun, dressed in a nun's habit. I'm also going to call her Sister Maria, as in Sister Maria Andretti, a distant relative of Mario Andretti. When that light turned green the sister stomped the accelerator. I was shifting to second gear about then and of course there was no way I was going to let the sister pass me, so we were off at break-neck speed up to 35 or 40 mph at least. I glanced at her again and she was staring straight ahead with a death grip on the steering wheel. There are times when we act just like the rest of the world, aren't there, and we need reminders.

In preparation for the sermon, a sermon about “the cup,” I have some other cups up here. The first cup I have is a pretty standard 16 oz. Styrofoam cup. A few years ago you could go to a Dairy Queen or a Tastee Freeze and this would be a medium drink. They had 12 oz. cups, 16 oz. cups, and 20 oz. cups. Go down to Lotta Burger just down the street . . . this is a medium drink now (32 oz.). This is the old medium and this is the new medium for 2008. I have some that are even better.

Some of you will recognize this. This is a Sonic drink. They have have half-price drinks and slushes during Happy Hour every day from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. This

is just a 32 oz. drink. Suzanne loves to go to Sonic during Happy Hour, but we get Route 44 drinks. That's a 44 oz. drink, so it's a lot larger than this one. I've got something even better. A couple of weeks ago I went to a TU game with Jimmie Younger and picked up this drink. This is a souvenir cup. I hate to tell you how much I paid for it, but you can see how big it is. I have something better here. Go to Quick Trip. This is 52 ounces . . . 52 ounces of pop. We don't have 7-Elevens in Tulsa because of competition between Quick Trip and 7-Eleven. A drink this size at a 7-Eleven is called a Big Gulp, and that's what that would be, wouldn't it? Fifty-two ounces of pop.

I've got one more. How about this? This is a Kum N Go—Suzanne says if you come and get that much pop, you're gonna be goin'! I asked the guy at Kum N Go if they had a name for it and he said, "We just call that the Half-Gallon." A half of gallon of pop.

I have one more here. It's not a communion cup. You wouldn't even be able to see a communion cup from where you are seated, but can you see this chalice? This chalice represents so much to us as people of the table, doesn't it? You probably can't tell from where you are seated, but around the chalice the potter has made a crown of thorns. In our communion hymn today we're going to sing a line from that hymn that says, "Did thorns ever compose so rich a crown?"

Our faith tells us just a sip from this chalice is enough. Has there ever been a time in our country, especially during this financial crisis, when we have needed to hear a word about taking a sip? We have seen several people who have taken a big gulp and we see what happens when that takes place.

You might not have heard the term, collateralized debt obligations, but I understand that is a part of what happened with this financial crisis. Banks and other lending institutions bought up these bad mortgages. The mortgages were worth more than the houses. People took a big gulp.

We need to speak honestly and openly about this. It is one reason why I'm so grateful for the gift of scripture. Scripture speaks honestly to us. In the gospel accounts of the Last Supper, the gospel writers don't say all the disciples were wonderful guys. Just the opposite. At that last meal with his disciples, Jesus said, "One of you will betray me." The disciples didn't look around and say, "Who is it?" They said, "Is it I, Lord?"

As we come to the table today, the living Christ still says to us, "One of you will betray me." If we are honest with ourselves and with God, we know from the way we've lived we need to say, "Is it I? Will I betray you again?"

A writer by the name of Samuel Shoemaker has written about this kind of self-questioning that he believes is at the heart of our faith. Shoemaker says,

"Self-questioning, is one of the essentials of the fellowship of the com-

munion table. So often in the world we are outwardly humble, but inwardly we feel proudly sure that we are right. In the Christian fellowship just the reverse is true. Outwardly we feel free to be ourselves, to let out our hearts, to make our mistakes, because we know that the fellowship will understand. Our humility is inward: it lies in constant self-questioning, even self-doubt. ‘Lord, is it I?’ Peter blusters away about his loyalty, and protests that he will go to prison and even death for Jesus—he feels the confidence to say all this in the fellowship. But he has missed a deeper note of fellowship. If he had questioned himself more, he would have failed less. There is no fellowship in Jesus unless we give the best we have, share what we think, pool our thoughts—but always with the remembrance, ‘I might be wrong.’ Great and terrible failures come in the fellowship of Jesus. In that fellowship, all must say, because all must keep a certain self-questioning, ‘Lord, is it I?’

We come to this table, which is a table of grace, saying “No!” to sin. Even more, we say “Yes!” to grace. One thing I love perhaps almost as much as anything about the table is this, remember in the time of Jesus the religious leaders of that day taught that if you wanted to be a religious person you needed to fast? You needed to go without. Now, this ceremony that is at the center of all we do and who we are symbolizes a meal, a meal in which we partake of the body and blood of Christ.

Just a sip is enough, however. The table challenges us to share even a sip of kindness, one word of encouragement. Even a sip of forgiveness is enough, just to be able to say to the person who has hurt us, “I forgive you. I won’t let this come between us.” A sip of hope is enough. One ray of light in the darkest night is enough. A sip of faith is enough. Jesus called it “mustard seed faith,” the tiniest of all seeds, but even a sip of faith is enough. A sip of joy that says death, once and for all, has been defeated.

As a young boy, I looked around the sanctuary and watched while others received communion. As an adult, I don’t need to do that. I know with my head bowed that there will be some in the sanctuary this morning who are hurting and angry and full of despair. At that quietest moment in the communion service there are times when I want to stand up and shout, “There is healing for your hurt. There is reconciliation for your anger. There is hope for your despair.”

As an adult, even with my head bowed, I know there are others outside this sanctuary who don’t understand. At times I want to stand up and say, “If we don’t share our faith they will never know.”

Even with my head bowed I can say that during the communion service at times I have noble thoughts of Christ and his sacrifice. There are other times when

my thoughts are so selfish I would be embarrassed to share them with you.

My favorite author has written these words about communion. He says, "We are at the table of the Lord, the table of forgiveness, the table where we can begin again all over. We can walk up here or through life angry or guilty or even tired and sad. But we don't have to walk away from here or through life angry or guilty or tired or sad. God makes it possible. Yet let us not forget the other dynamic. 'As we forgive those who trespass against us,' also means forgiving those who have hurt us. "Come unto me.' 'Your sins are forgiven!' This is the invitation from Christ. God's love makes it possible any day, and God intends to make it happen today, here at this table. What better news for you and me to claim, to feel in our bones, and to pass along because we have the divine privilege of experiencing it right here today."

In a few minutes we will come forward to the table. It is my prayer that you will know and believe that even a sip of God's love is enough. Amen.