

The Vessel of Loving Energy

A sermon¹ preached at Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, California,
on Sunday, April 22, 2018, by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer.

Scriptures: [2 Corinthians 4:5-12](#) and [Mark 6:1-3a](#)

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Moving into Triads

If you're not already sitting in a group of three, please move so you are. If you didn't bring a cup, please pick one up from the cart in the back of the sanctuary.

Homily

I wonder how many times I've resolved (New Year's or otherwise) to adopt some spiritual practice that I think would be good for me or that would make me more spiritual mature or would make me better in some way. I'm sure the number is high.

I think I'm pretty resistant to making such a resolution now, but back in the days when I would make such a resolution, I've entered into the practice or program with great earnestness. I would want to do it "right." I could get so caught up in doing spiritual stuff "right," it's almost laughable. It would be much more laughable if I still didn't sometimes fall into that trap.

One of the ways I think this is a trap is that underlying it is an assumption that I am responsible for my own spiritual growth, that my spiritual growth was up to me. The way out of the trap has been realizing that my spiritual growth is reliant on God's loving energy moving through me. I thought I was seeking to improve myself or mature myself or better myself. Really what I was seeking was my own transformation. And transformation is reliant on the work of God.

Jesus' invitation for me to take up my cross, his invitation for me to die so that I might live is an invitation to let go of my ego. For you, the invitation may be different, but for me it's about letting go of my ego. Not the easiest thing to do when part of your job is to get up in front of a crowd more weeks than not and say something that you think will be impactful and important.

Still, I have found that when I allow my ego to control my inner life, my spiritual life, I get nowhere. It is as if I have filled my cup with my ego and there's no room for God. When I empty my cup, when I dump out the ego that thinks it can control and transform, then there is room. I have found that when I empty my cup, then God can (and so far always does) choose to fill my up with loving energy. My ego may think it's the perfect thing to fill my cup, but I am at my best when I am an empty vessel. That is when God fills me with loving energy.

Personal growth does take some effort on my part. Letting my ego die so Christ can live in me takes effort – for me, at least. Letting myself go and trusting God takes some

¹ This sermon is based on Joyce Rupp, *The Cup of Our Life* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1997), 30-32.

effort. But I can't force the growth. That's God's department. I can yearn for transformation. I can be faithful in a spiritual practice (especially if I can let go of doing it perfectly). But if I think that the spiritual practice does anything more than open my spirit, if I think my spiritual practice does anything more than help me become the empty cup, all I will do is stumble along, and I will bear no fruit.

Paul plants, Apollos waters, but God gives the growth.

Another way I stumble is by focusing on the results. Am I transforming fast enough? Am I transforming enough? When I start judging myself that way, I end up reviving my ego, I end up drawing my ego center stage again, and then I get in the way of what God is doing. When I start judging myself, I forget that I am at my best when I am an empty cup, a vessel for God's loving energy.

Breath Prayer

Hold your cup in your hands and shut your eyes. Breathing in think these words to yourself, "Your power ..." and breathing out think these words, "... moving through me."

Guided Reflection

As you hold the cup, notice the space inside it. Remember that the cup is a container. That space is designed to hold something.

Now, set the cup down. Feel your own pulse – in your wrist or your neck. Or place your hand over your heart and feel it pumping. Visualize the blood pumping through your body. Remember that it carries nutrients to every part of your body. Visualize it bringing glucose to all the different cells in your body. See it sustaining life, bringing energy for growth.

Close your eyes and sense God's goodness filling your spirit. Picture God's energy pulsing through you. Welcome God's loving energy surging through your being.

Pick up your cup again, and ask yourself one of these questions:
How have I known God's power working in me and through me?
What are some obstacles blocking the flow of loving energy within me?
What part of my life most needs the powerful touch of God?

A Time of Sharing

You're invited to move to a time of sharing within your triad. This will be six minutes long. You can divide the time up so each person gets two minutes (I'll ring a bell every six minutes) or you can just share and the Spirit moves you. Here are some prompts to help you begin your sharing:

I have known God's power working in me and through me when ...

An obstacle blocking the flow of God's loving energy through me is ...

A part of my life that needs the powerful touch of God is ...

Scriptural Affirmation

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

Prayer of Affirmation

Let us pray together

Energizing and transforming God, the pulse of your presence fills my life with love. Keep reminding me that I do not grow by my own efforts alone. Thank you for the comfort and freedom of knowing that it is your power working through me that creates growth in my spiritual life. Amen.