

John 7:37-39

When someone's bucket is empty, it's natural for them to draw out of someone else's bucket. This happens when someone has been beaten down by life. The temptation is too great to overcome. He or she will become takers at the expense of others. We see this in a marriage where both husband and wife are constantly at each other. They are both trying to draw from the other's bucket, but since both buckets are empty, it becomes a vicious cycle. Children who come out of such families are affected in a negative way. Their buckets, too, are usually empty--their parents doing little or nothing to affirm them. Such children often grow up with feelings of low self-worth. They become targets of drugs, alcohol, and sexual promiscuity as they live their days with their buckets mostly empty.

It is not always good, however, to have a full bucket. It can be full of the wrong things. There are plenty of people in society who feel very good about themselves. They contribute much, and are givers more than takers. But their self-worth comes from their accomplishments, or some other passing thing, and not from the faith that they are children of the Heavenly Father, loved by Him, and redeemed from sin by His Son, Jesus Christ. Such full buckets will help someone in this life, but not in the life to come.

Jesus does a strange thing in our text for today. At least it likely appeared to be strange to everyone watching and listening. He stood up in the temple which was full of people and cried out, "*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink!*" Jesus is the only one who never drew out of someone else's bucket. He was never a taker. He came to serve, to give Himself for others. People were always taking out of His bucket. He was "*a man of sorrows,*" despised and rejected, "*smitten, stricken, and afflicted,*" and finally nailed to a tree. But this is why He became one of us. He came to empty Himself. He came so that we might drink and be filled.

When He cried out in the temple, He did not say, "Everyone of you...come to Me and drink!" He said, "*If anyone is thirsty, let him come...*" Not everyone is thirsty. Too many are drinking from the wrong fountain. Their thirst is being quenched, but not with what Jesus gives. Many people are satisfied with life. They work hard. They have hobbies. They enjoy family and friends. They take vacations. They may have full buckets, being affirmed by their boss and coworkers, by spouse, children, and friends. You know such people. You rub shoulders with them. You work with them. They may live on your street. Their thirst is for life and what it has to offer. It's not for Jesus. They would not say that they are against Jesus. They simply do not thirst for hearing His words, for His Sacrament, for His forgiveness. Jesus is not for them, at least not now.

There are some who thirst for alcohol. Some thirst for drugs. Some thirst for sex. Most thirst for attention. Most thirst for the good life. But to thirst for Jesus is a gift that comes from the Holy Spirit. Are you thirsty, and what are you thirsty for? Well, you're here today. Are you here with an empty bucket? Has life been beating you down? Have others been against you? Have they been drawing out of your bucket? Or, if your bucket is full, what is it filled with? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit because you are in the words of Jesus daily, and in His House weekly, and at His Supper faithfully? Or is your bucket filled with what you have taken from the buckets of others? Or have you filled your bucket with pride over your accomplishments, or pride over the way you give to God and serve your neighbor?

You cannot put more into a bucket that is already full. The Lord's Supper is not for those who refuse to acknowledge their sinfulness, being full of themselves. The Gospel is not to be given as a precious pearl to swine who are filled with the things of this world. But if we take our sins seriously. If we

mean the words we say...*"I, a poor, miserable sinner..."* then our buckets are not full at all, and then Jesus' words, His invitation is for us, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."*

Jesus drank the cup of suffering, and He did this for you. He drank, without stopping, God's wrath and punishment against your sin. He drank the agony of hell. He drained the cup for every sinner. This is why He invites you to drink of Him. Because He, now, is pure forgiveness for you. His cup is filled with His precious blood that *takes away the sin of the world*. It matters not how empty your bucket is. Jesus invites spouses who are always at each other in anger, to come to Him and freely drink. He invites children who have no self-worth, who have been caught up in the world of drugs, and alcohol, and sex, to turn away from such sins and freely drink His mercy.

There is no decision for you to make here. Jesus already made the decision for you. He chose to suffer and die for you. He chose to endure hell for you. And He chooses right now to give Himself fully to you so that you will be filled, not with pride, not with the world, not with yourself...Jesus fills you with His Spirit; He fills you with His gifts; He fills you with faith. You may come here to His House, and to His Table of Grace, completely empty. But you leave here filled with Jesus. And if you live somewhere in this world, life will beat you down again this week. But fear not. Next Sunday, also, Jesus will be here inviting you, forgiving you, filling you.

So you leave here today with a full bucket. What do you do with it? How do you use it? Jesus tells us...*"Whoever comes to Me and drinks...out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* Jesus fills you not just for your sake, but also for the sake of others. The Holy Spirit who came in full measure on the Day of Pentecost, who is coming into you today through Word and through Sacrament, will now flow out of you for others. Do you understand? You are leaving here today with your bucket full. Now your spouse and children, your neighbors and even your enemies can draw out of your bucket, and it's okay. That's what it's for. Jesus fills you with His Spirit, and now you, because you are forgiven, can forgive others; because you are loved, can love others; because you have joy and hope in Christ, can share that with others. If you know someone whose bucket is mostly empty, and I think you do...you can go and fill their bucket with the same love of Jesus, the same peace, and joy, and hope that has filled your bucket today. Amen.