

Sermon – Maundy Thursday
Matthew 26:17-46
April 13, 2017

“Drink This...You’ll Feel Better”

When I was in the first grade, I had some sort of infection that earned me a week in the hospital. My folks brought me home along with a little brown bottle of something called codeine. After all the prodding and poking I went through in the hospital, polishing off that bottle didn’t seem so bad - till I tasted it. It was awful! Sure, it would solve my infection, if I could survive sliding it down my throat twice a day that is. As any kid would, I tried to negotiate with my mother, telling her I thought half the bottle would probably do the trick. That didn’t work. Each morning when I woke up, and each night before bed, mom would whisk a teaspoon up to my lips and say “*Kenny, take this, all of it now – so you’ll get better.*”

Little did I know then how relatively lucky I was to have to only ingest a bottle about this size. A few years ago, before a colon procedure designed especially for guys over 50, like me, my doctor handed me a prescription and said “*you’ll have to drink some solution before coming in for your test, to make sure we clean you out*”. Some solution? I handed my prescription to the pharmacist and a couple a minutes later he slung a bottle like this over the counter at me. “*Most people like to mix this with some of the flavor packs we send home*” he said. How nice. By 1:00 AM the next morning, with quite a bit of room temperature peppermint flavored sodium and potassium chloride still left, I was up to my old childhood tricks, wondering if being “*cleaned out*” was really all that necessary and why half the bottle couldn’t suffice. “*Drink this, all of it so we can treat you properly*” was the doctor’s order, - so drink of it, all of it, I did.

Our lesson for this Holy Thursday from Matthew presents a portrait of our Lord Jesus, who, for obvious reasons does not feel well, and now has real reservations about something he is being asked to drink. “*Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me*”. He knew that he had to drink it, not so that he would get well, but that we would get well. What was in “*that cup*”? Cain’s murderous jealousy was in there. Abraham and Sarah’s impatience with God was in there. Moses’ anger and Israel’s wilderness grumbling were in there. David’s lust was in there. Solomon’s greed was in there. Added to a base of Adam and Eve’s pride and the serpent’s hatred of all things holy and “*that cup*” contained a ruinous concoction. It was worse than death. It was sin.

And it wasn’t just the past that was in that cup. That night’s betrayal and denial of his disciples, the next morning’s sneering, shallow questioning of the Pharisees and the cruel indifference of the Romans was in there. “*That cup*” contained your sins too. And Jesus knew how bitter it would taste, no less than I knew what my cup of sodium chloride or codeine would taste like. And Jesus wanted, for a brief moment at least, a reason why he should drink it.

“Why Father? You and I have a perfect relationship. Like you, I have offered them a better way and they have declined. Why must I drink their cup of sin? Why must I insure their forgiveness and salvation tonight, when they didn’t want before, don’t seem to want it now, and won’t want it later? Why not let them die forever the deaths they deserve? Will this cup I drink bring any of them closer to us, even one?” On the night Jesus was betrayed, he asked a question it seemed even God in heaven had no sure answer for – would it make us better?

In the terrible silence of the garden, like so many mothers with determined looks and waiting teaspoons of medicine, Jesus received his answer. *“Drink this...all of it.”* And so our Savior did. The sickness wasn’t his, but he took the cure. He drank that cup so that tonight, we might, in full contemplation of our sin but in full confidence in his forgiveness, drink from the cup he commands us to take - this little one here. Will the healing power of this gift of life compel your heart to live like he did? It matters not how old you are or how much you understand about this sacrament - “this cup” is your salvation if this cup be received in faith. It matters not if that faith is childlike and wondering or wise and weathered. If it is faith in Jesus, it is a faith that saves you.

“Drink of it...all of it, all of you”. The cup Jesus drank was your sin...the cup he offers you tonight is your forgiveness. Come that Jesus’ obedient prayer be answered thus- *yes Father, if I drink this cup they will come to you, and when they do, they will be healed.* AMEN