

SERMON: "CUPS RUNNETH OVER"

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT EXODUS 17:1-7, PSALM 23
NEW TESTAMENT MARK 14:22-25**

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INTRODUCTION

Ask 10 random member of this church what is the most attractive thing about our church building ... and 9 out of 10, maybe 10 will say, 'the stained glass windows.' Makes sense then to do this series of sermons.

But another question about the church building, this room in particular, will yield a different answer or answers ... what are the three things in this room that make it a sanctuary (a place for us to worship together)
Any suggested answers? Give you a hint. It's not the stained glass windows.

Another hint. For any of you who have moved things around in here
Think set up for the Christmas Cantata. You may have heard me grumble when this piece needed to be moved out.

Those three things are – the communion table, the pulpit and the baptismal font.
Without these the room is just a meeting place or auditorium

Think about the churches you have been in, what they looked like inside
What was featured up front? What is featured or not featured tells you a bit about what they believe and how they worship.
Their focus may be on preaching with a towering pulpit
Or on the eucharist, like a Roman Catholic church with a large altar.

Or Both. Presbyterians try and feature all of the above
When you set foot in a Presbyterian Church, you should see a pulpit (it may be modest, may be paired with another place to speak, a lectern)
You should see a communion table (not an altar pushed up against a wall) but a table that can be approached from all sides

And you should see a baptismal font (hopefully uncovered with water in it)
These aren't featured as much as they should be, often off to the side.
I moved the one here centrally shortly after my arrival. Plan for it to stay there
Not going to move it aside for weddings. I want the bride to walk past it.
Dip her fingers in it and remember her baptism and what it means

I dip my fingers in it every week to remember what it means to be baptized, to be claimed and kept by God's love, to be sealed. I like how Catholic churches have the water toward the back so people can do that - remember their baptism.

WATER AT WORK

I say all this about these important 'pieces of furniture' because the window we want to talk about today features the sacraments ...

holy communion and baptism. Let's start at the top with the cup / chalice

We'll start there and work our way down because these images are very much connected. You see the water pouring down?

I'm going to focus on that water imagery not only because it intentionally connects the images top and bottom ... but also because for some reason,

there is no bread in the window about the sacraments. I think there should be

I feel like the lady in the old Wendy's commercial, "Where's the ... bread?"

I did find one bread image in stained glass. It's behind the pulpit!

I wish they had included bread in this window. Put it up there by the cup.

They did not. We will wait on that and talk bread in October

That is when we are planning to go back to communion with bread offered.

We will probably keep those little cups for those who prefer that. I prefer bread

Enough about what's not in the window. Let's talk water

The description in the bulletin emphasizes the flowing water saying ...

Out of the cup flows the living water or the graces of the Church. These graces flow downward to the Holy Sacraments. The Holy Sacraments are represented by the cross which also symbolizes Christ. The flowing water, the green branches of olive leaves represent the inexhaustible stream of the Church's graces we receive like the fish within the water. Grace and strength for a holy life.

The key point of the sermon being preached by the window is that the water flows, the cup runneth over (that is why I chose Psalm 23 for today, cup runneth over

They describe it as ... an inexhaustible stream we receive like fish within water.

Love that description! That is water at work, flowing and going.

Have you ever dipped your hands in these waters?

Maybe to get one of those glass beads on the Baptism of the Lord Sunday?

If you have, maybe you noticed that at times those beads feel a little yucky

It's like they are wearing sweaters.

The worship committee (and pastors) have been diligent about cleaning the font.

We learned we've got to refresh the water and to use distilled water.

The still waters of Psalm 23 are a peaceful image. But even those waters probably were not so still as to become static or stagnant

Water is meant to flow and feed. The cup, like a fountain, is supposed to runneth over. And it does in that window

We've got waterfalls in our windows!

FLOWING

We have still waters and cups running over in Psalm 23
And we've got water flowing and falling in the passage from Exodus
That God-given water flowed in the desert. It flowed out of a rock!
The people needed water in an arid land. And faced with
that most basic need, they did what people do. They complained.

**So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do for this people?
They are almost ready to stone me." The LORD said to Moses, "Go on
ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you;
take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go.
I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike
the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."
Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place
Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested
the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"**

Interesting end to the story. It is named not for God's provision of water
our most basic of basic needs. It is named for their complaining.
I think that is a warning or at least a reminder to focus on the good God
has done and is doing rather than testing God or complaining.
Given that naming strategy lots of places might be named "How much longer?"

I did not pick this story to highlight their complaints (or to complain about complaining)
I picked it to talk about how God provides. God provides our basic needs
God provides water. And not just that but water out of a rock in the desert.
How did our forebears describe the waterfall in the window ... an *inexhaustible
stream of the Church's graces we receive like the fish within the water.*

This water flows out of the cup representing the sacrament of holy communion
into a font representing the other sacrament – baptism. Connected by water,
flowing water ... a cup runneth over kind of waterfall

When we remember Christ's body broken for us and blood shed for us
as we celebrate communion with the risen Christ and all his people,
We also remember our baptism (not the actual act exactly)
My memory is not that good. We remember that in baptism we have been sealed
by the love of God. Like God writing their name on us.

Baptism and communion are connected to each other ... and to the pulpit
Word and sacrament. All together, all preaching sermons
Sermons from the pulpit. And the table. And the font. And the windows.
All these connect like the mist from a mighty waterfall.

That is my favorite thing about this window – the waterfall. I love waterfalls

SUMMARY

I had a chance to visit one the world's largest and most well known waterfalls
My first sabbatical on African-American spirituality included a trip to South Africa
While we were there in 2010 we took a side trip to the Zimbabwe
I've always wanted to see Victoria Falls. I saw it. I experienced it

Show image – Victoria Falls

The locals give it the name 'The Smoke that Thunders'
Before you see the falls you see the 'smoke' ... a fine mist like a cloud
landed just over the river. And you hear it. It roars like thunder
Planning your trip, you are told you will need a poncho. You definitely do!
In the wet season, they make you wear one. They're happy to sell you one.

The falls are awesome in every sense ... literally
They are huge. Twice the height of Niagara Falls (still need to go there)
and more than twice the width (over 5,600 feet wide).
There were so many sights to see. I felt like I was at a tennis match
My head going back and forth back and forth from one section to another.

It is so very beautiful you see it not just with your eyes ... but with your soul
It takes your breath away, leaves you awestruck and maybe even in tears
And you don't just see it. You hear it ... that roar.
You feel it like a steady gentle rain. You're half a football field away
Or more. But you still feel it. You most certainly still hear it

After preaching this series of sermons about these windows
including the one with the cup runneth over waterfall featuring the sacraments
I'm going to think about Victoria Falls when I notice that window
And when I think about the connection of table and font and pulpit

You see God's love for this world, for you and me, it runneth over so much
that it is bigger and better than Victoria Falls. But like Victoria Falls
it is something to be experienced in multiple ways, with all our senses
That is the beauty of the sacraments ... God showing us love
with more than just words ... with to and through all our senses

God isn't just telling you how much you, y'all and all y'all are loved
through the words of some preacher. God is singing it in the songs
baking it in the bread for you to taste and see that God is good,
painting in the skies and in the windows for us to see it ...
and pouring it out in the font and falls.

A cup runneth over ... all over us like raindrops