

“Filled to the Brim!”

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John 4:1-26*

- I am blessed by your presence this morning!
- Is that a new hairstyle? It's very becoming!
- Are those new shoes? Great look!

Eleanor, who passed away earlier this month, would always say to me, after church, at Fellowship Time; “You look great!” I'd smile and tell her that she made my day.

I recently had dinner with some lovely people, and one of them asked me, “Have you lost weight? You look like you have.” I smiled and said thank you and that she had brightened my day.

Now, I can't speak to my friend's eyesight, with these kind of complementary words, but I do know I felt uplifted and even happier with their expressions.

Oh, and a young man (one of the performers at the Wyoming Valley West, glorious production of “Les Miserables”), standing in the cast line, after the performance, complimented me on my tie, as we were all lauding them.

These positive events have a cumulative effect on us. I thought of that old coffee, (Folgers, I believe) commercial where the person enjoys the coffee so much she says, “Fill it to the Brim!”

Fill it up, right to the top of the cup!

Fill it to the Brim – with something good!!

Psychologist Donald Clifton, began in the mid 20th century to wonder why psychology almost always looks at what was wrong with people. He decided to study what was right with people.

In his research he found, not surprisingly, that our lives are shaped by our interactions with others. But, here is a key element, “every interaction makes a difference.” Our personal encounters are almost never neutral – they are almost always positive or negative. And they accumulate and profoundly affect our lives. From the simplest encounter, of passing by someone who smiles/or frowns, to a life-altering event – all of our experiences affect us – you and me!

Dr. Clifton has come up with a very helpful and simple metaphor. You see each of us have an invisible bucket. It is constantly being emptied or filled, depending on what others say or do to us.

Empty Bucket – we feel awful!

Full bucket – we feel great! Full to the brim!

Each of us also has an invisible dipper (ladle). We can use it to fill other people’s buckets – by saying or doing things to increase their positive emotions, we also fill our own bucket; or we can use our ladle to take from others’ buckets, by saying or doing things that decrease their positive emotions and we also diminish ourselves.

A full bucket gives us a positive outlook and renewed energy. Every drop makes you stronger and more positive. An empty bucket poisons our outlook, saps our energy, and undermines our will.

Everyday we have a choice –

We can fill one another’s bucket, or we can dip from them.

This is an extremely important choice!

My friends, do not underestimate even the most trivial, brief interactions – when considering the filling of your bucket.

Yes, you have the power to positively impact someone else, or to draw down on the health of his/her soul. Of course, they can compensate for your negativity – but it’s so sad that they must spend their energy in this way.

Studies are showing that negative emotions can be harmful to your health, and may even shorten your life. Positive emotions are an essential daily requirement for survival, and for your physical and mental health. They can also provide a buffer against depression and illness.

- Something Jesus knew about and understood about the human condition – 2,000 years ago. Jesus was interested and devoted to helping people to be Filled to the Brim in their lives!

Jesus has been down south in more cosmopolitan Judea, and is on his way north to Galilee. Once again, we hear that Jesus had to go through Samaria (that foreign place hated by Jews and quite reciprocated by the Samaritans). We’re not looking (in this set up) for a lot of bucket filling – between Jews and Samaritans. No way! Better to protect your bucket from getting kicked across Galilee, and holes pounded into it! With this context – bucket emptying would have been the norm.

Jesus stops at Jacob’s well, around noontime. High noon! A Samaritan woman comes out to ladle some water from Jacob’s well. This was a daily event. We all need water, bucket’s full! And Jesus asks this Samaritan woman for some water! Unheard of! Shocking!! “How could he conceive of drinking water from such a Samaritan ladle?” she asks. She is incredulous, in the near empty bucket of her life. She is dying of thirst, that inner thirst that this well could not assuage.

Jesus tells her of the living water available to her, if she would but ask. Again she is confused, “But you do not have a bucket, a ladle to get the water out of this well.” Jesus tells her of this living water of life, is more thirst quenching than even Jacob’s well. Of course he is talking about a way of life, a way of imbibing life! Filling her emotional/spiritual life! Filling her life to the brim! Way up to the top!

Jesus has touched a nerve, for she is thirsty for such a life!

The story exposes the way she has been living, how she is carrying around an almost totally empty bucket. She keeps making trip after trip after trip to fill her bucket, but it is depleted almost as soon as she fills it. Her life is empty. She thirsts for so much more!

I imagine how many negative human ladles surrounded her every day – stealing the water from her bucket, with their judgmentalism, cadiness, holier than thou, selfishness, and misuse of her. The Samaritan woman is thirsting to death! She needs more than the same old, same old of going to this well day in and day out!

And Jesus arrives – ladling (pouring) living water into her bucket!

The living water of forgiveness, understanding, hope and joy!

She is so full, so overjoyed she shares (ladles) this new way of life, with others. Buckets upon Buckets are being filled!! Filled to the brim!

Are you tired of living with an almost empty bucket! Do you need a focus, a vision that will continuously fill your bucket?

Christ offers such a way to live! A way of life!

And, as your bucket fills – you ladle into others those positive points of life – increasing wholeness for others and yourself.

Are you running on empty or full?

Jesus has called us to offer “living water” – love, hope, forgiveness and acceptance.

How are you doing with that?

In your briefest of encounters, have you ladled in living water, or taken away some of what he/she had before your contact?

Are you sharing this hope-filled living water?

It’s your choice, although as a Christian the choice should be a no brainer!

See if you can keep count of how many times you ladle something positive into another’s bucket – the rest of the day/week!

Filled to the Brim! That’s the goal!

Oh, and you have a wonderful smile!

Amen.