

NOVEMBER 16, 2022 MIDWEEK DEVOTIONAL

CENTERING PRAYER

Make us masters of ourselves that we can become servants of others.

Take our minds and think through them.

Take our lips and speak through them.

Take our hearts and set them on fire.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: 1 PETER 4:9"

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

AND TITUS 1:8

But hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

AND MARK 9:41

For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

BLESSED THOUGHTS: "GOD IN A CUP OF COFFEE"

There are two things that are in a lot of our homes, but which are never mentioned in the Bible. The first is surprising. Bible Hebrew never once mentions "cats," perhaps because cats were associated with Egyptian gods. The other thing that is never mentioned in the Bible is "coffee," although Arabian coffee is a staple beverage throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Well, the cats are on their own, but let's look for God in a cup of coffee.

Some of you know I served a parish in Manitoba for nineteen years, from 1978 to 1997. One of my challenges was instill a sense of community in my one congregation, so I got a local craftsman (thank you, Herman) to make a coffee cart and I started brewing coffee for after worship. The first Sunday almost no one stopped to drink a cup—everyone was off like a bat out of a cave (some wanted to beat the Anglicans to the best tables at a local restaurant). The next Sunday I stood in the doorway and announced, "No one leaves here until you've had a cup of coffee." One guy took half a cup, swished it down, showed it to me and said, "So, can I go now?" Lesser men might have been discouraged, but each Saturday night, before leaving the church for my house, I set up that urn and put out the cups and the sugar and creamer, and pretty soon folks gathered around the urn, they drank their java, and they talked. Why? Because we are by nature social beings who enjoy "our many good friendships."

At St. Paul's, Brunkild, the government outlawed our coffee hour during the pandemic, at least until the vaccines came in. As soon as we were allowed, it was back to our coffee corner like before! My wife told me, "Barry, face it, no one in their 80's really needs a sermon to tell them how to live, but many are lonely and they all do need that coffee time, just to catch up on local news, all the more so after they become widows or widowers." I also loved the coffee time, because I always heard so many stories about the neighborhood, and the coffee was free, and strong enough to keep me awake on my drive home. My wife's people always said that good Norwegian coffee needed to be strong enough to hold up the spoon! Our family's congregation has an Icelandic heritage, and Icelandic neighbors always served strong coffee to help each other get through the long, dark winters.

It was while I served Lac du Bonnet and Pinawa that I started getting stress-induced chest pains. My doctor said, “You’ll have to either give up the ministry—or drinking coffee! Your body will not allow you to do both. So, for two decades I never had a sip of coffee! Then, after a trying ministry experience in another parish, I decided to choose coffee over my job, and I have never looked back (I went back to the big three—Stress, Ministry, and Coffee—around 1999, and I’m still here).

Now why do I make a fuss over the three cups of coffee I drink every day? At my Ordination Service, our then Synod Leader challenged me “to live up to my calling,” and one of the things I promised him and God and myself was “to show hospitality to all, but especially to those of household of faith!” Sharing coffee and baking together after worship is one way of doing just that. Since we have confirmation after worship, I also volunteer to stay while my older grandchildren attend their group, and then I drive them home. Since I have some time to wait, I began volunteering to wash the coffee cups and popcorn bowls downstairs. It’s not exactly the same as when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, but I like to be useful.

Hospitality is more than just a coffee hour. Our family has taken in foster children, and housed visiting clergy and missionaries and youth groups from out of town. One time we even entertained a couple from my first parish who dropped by on their honeymoon! I’ve tried to keep my promises to God about welcoming folks, but I’m nowhere near to how welcomed I have been made to feel by so many Christian folks all over North America. I particularly thank God for an old Lutheran pastor who opened up his church to a whole bunch of Saskatchewan kids I had taken to Texas for a youth gathering in 1973. He even bought a bunch of watermelons for us! Awesome. Likewise I always remember how Margaret, who was a refugee from the Sudanese civil war, invited me over for a lunch featuring Sudanese peanut soup. Again, don’t knock it until you’ve tried it!

All this points me to the Age to Come. Do you have any idea how warm and heart-felt our welcome there will be when Jesus Christ invites us into his world? Until then, may the coffee be hot, and our Christian caring be even warmer, and may we all keep awake spiritually for every chance to show hospitality. Amen

PRAYER

Welcome to our table, join hands and know how happy we are that you’re here. Yes, Lord, let everyone of our tables radiate your heavenly welcome, too. Amen

MUSICAL BLESSING

I love this Communion Hymn from Liberia. If you are able click on this link and sing along to “Come, Let Us Eat”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTQcjafvtTA>

—written by the old coffee brewer, Pastor Barry, in mid-October of 2022