

Psalm 23:5-6
Cups Running Over
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Throughout this month, one where we've looked at the subject of generosity, I have drawn your attention to one chapter in the Scriptures. It's probably the one with which you are all most familiar. Psalm 23 has been called the most recognizable piece of poetry ever penned. I've drawn your attention to it because Psalm 23 is above all an invitation to a life of abiding trust, and unfathomable peace.

Psalm 23 is an invitation for you and me to see clearly the Savior who stands in the middle of our lives and acknowledge the beautiful statement found smack dab in the middle of this beautiful passage: "you are with me." **God is with you, no matter what. He'll never leave you. He is never surprised by your circumstance, and promises to go before you.** Bookending this Gospel truth are two images: the Shepherd who leads us through valleys into green pastures, and the second image which we will look at today is the image of a table.

For a brief moment I want to take you back to the place of my childhood, and maybe it resembles your childhood as well. I don't know if I've ever mentioned it but I was raised in town in Minnesota, which you may know is the land of, among other things, Scandinavians and Lutherans, of which I was both. And neither of them are much known for their expressiveness, or demonstrativeness. We Scandinavians have the ability to be together in deep love and fellowship and not really say much. But that gene skipped a generation with my mom and her sister. And the thing that was always present in our life together was a table...and the smell of coffee brewing in the kitchen. And whether it was a crisis or a celebration, whether somebody got a job or somebody had a baby, or somebody died, what we did was sit around the table together, eating and drinking coffee.

I remember the very first time someone in my life that someone close to me died. It was 2003, I got a call from my mom as I was walking to my car after baseball practice, telling me Grandma Marian died. So, I got in the car and drove straight up to Richfield where they lived. When I got there I met them at a Perkins Restaurant, what were they doing? Sitting around a table drinking coffee and eating pie, not even three hours after she'd passed.

The image of a table is a visible embodiment of the community of Christ, it is a place where the kingdom of God is put on display. It's also an enacted protest against the powers of evil and darkness that seek to instill fear in us and drive us apart. Throughout the Scriptures the devil is described as one who seeks to divide, undo, and isolate us from one another through doubt and suspicion. And that goal is achieved when we anxiously rush around. God, time and again says to his people, don't just do something, sit there. There is example of example where the people of God feel like the weight of the world is bearing down on them, and what does God say: don't worry, I got it.

Exodus 14: When the Israelites are on the banks of the Red Sea staring out over what looks like their watery demise, as Pharaoh's army is bearing down on them, Moses says: stand firm, do not be afraid, and see the deliverance that I will accomplish for you today. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.

When the Israelite Army was surrounded by the Arameans in 2 Kings 6, Elisha's servant, facing an entire army around them asked Elisha, what are we to do? Elisha calmly declared, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." Then Elisha calmly prayed that his servant's eyes would be opened to see the Angel hosts in chariots of fire surrounding them.

Luke 22: Jesus when preparing to leave his disciples, told them: listen, whenever you are given to anxiety and despair, gather around a table and do this remembering me.

Look at verse 5 with me, "you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." **Notice that in none of these examples does God promise that he will set a table for us at a comfortable distance from our enemies and anxieties.** The Kingdom Banquet we share together, the places where believers gather together with one another will always be surrounded by a watching, and not always friendly world. If you wait to seek and savor the presence and fellowship of the Holy Spirit and one another until things are good, or life is not confusing or busy, we then you might just miss it all together. Because what God offers is an opportunity for shalom, for abundance, for love and joy, right in the middle of a conflict-ridden, warring world.

I don't know if you saw this picture, it was a profound image. It's a long banquet table spread out right on the border of the US and Mexico. And without making a political statement, what an amazing picture this is of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God crosses boundaries, it crosses ethnicities, it crosses socio-economic statuses, it crosses political differences, the image Jesus used to describe abundance, fullness, wholeness, profound in its simplicity is none other than a banquet table or a breakfast nook, where coffee is poured, conversation shared, and where reconciliation is experienced. At a table.

The Poet David goes on to say that God anoints his head with oil. The act of anointing is one of the most tender and profound acts one can do for another. In the Old Testament, anointing with oil was something that was done in a moment of consecration, preparing the temple or tabernacle for the holy purpose which it was built. There's a famous image from Psalm 133 and Leviticus 8 in which Aaron the High Priest is prepared and set apart for the holy task of mediating on behalf of the people. It's sort of like the conduit or lubricant through which the Holy Spirit might flow out to the people.

But anointing with oil is also a tender and intimate gesture of blessing, of expressing how beloved and important one is to another. In Luke's Gospel there is a moment where Jesus is eating at the table of one of the Pharisees. And while they are at dinner, it says "a woman of the city" came and stood behind him—she could not even face Jesus in her shame—and taking an alabaster flask she took the oil inside which was of astronomical worth and began pouring it on his feet anointing them with the oil and her tears wiping with her hair and kissing his feet.

It's hard to comprehend the value of this oil and just how sacrificial this act was. **But what is plain to see is that this act drew this woman to Jesus' side and he to hers in a way that crossed boundaries.**

Then in the middle of this table of blessing, this table of communion, and fellowship is a cup—an overflowing cup. This is one of the most delicious and joyful images of all scripture. It's why I've titled this series Runneth Over. Not only does the table signify a place of connection, but it's at this

table with the cup before us where we see that God's provision for us is **not just enough but it is running over with abundance**. The table is where people of all tribe and tongue, all creed and color come and experience the goodness of God's love and mercy.

There's a restaurant in Philadelphia called EAT Café that is taking this image of the unifying table to a new level. Typically, there is an immediate and very obvious line of demarcation separating those who can and those who cannot come to a restaurant. To eat at a restaurant, you need money to pay for the food. Not at EAT, here they have a pay-what-you-can model. Thanks to donations of food and the generosity of donors, men and women who may struggle to make ends meet, not knowing where and when the next meal will come, can do something dignifying that many of us take for granted, they can eat at a restaurant where servers take their order and call them sir and ma'am.

As we think about this image of generosity, you'll notice that I haven't said much this month about how much we need or what is the right percentage of your income to pledge. But I am focusing more of my attention on this image of life in the Kingdom of God. You see in the Kingdom of God lives are provided for, bellies are full, and relationships are fuller still. In the Kingdom of God, our lives are marked by faith and trust that it is God who sets the table, it is God who provides for our every need—not our ability to plan and save and invest well. In the Kingdom of God, we resonate with the verse that says truly it is more blessed to give than to receive. In the Kingdom of God we live a life of faith that is not closed fist, but open handed.

One of the most beautiful pictures of this in the bible is found in Isaiah 25. Here Isaiah receives a vision, it's the vision of a feast. **On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine (not grape juice), of food full of marrow, of age wine well refined. And on this mountain he will swallow up the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations (the veil that keeps us from seeing one another as children of God, but as adversaries). He will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, for the Lord has spoken.**

This prophecy was fulfilled, not with a grand military victory and defeat on the battle field, but was fulfilled around a simple table in which 12 friends gathered with their teacher, who gave them bread and wine and said whenever you eat and drink, do it remembering me. For this is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet being prepared at the end of all things. And he sealed this promise with his own blood that runneth over and out over our lives for the forgiveness of our sins and the healing of the nations.

This is the good news we gather to proclaim week after week, it's the message we seek to share with our community in winsome and compelling ways. It's the message we need your support in continuing. Here at WPC we are moving in exciting new directions. Whether it's ministry to kids and their families in the downtown sector of Wabash, or providing one of the best Preschool experiences in town for our children, or making possible opportunities for worship and reflection in this beautiful and historic and sacred space. We pray that today would be an opportunity for you to offer a sacrifice of praise and generosity, not out of obligation or begrudgingly, but with joy for the great things the Jesus is doing here in the heart of Wabash.

As children of the most high God, we give because so much has been given to us. We give because time and again, God has provided for us. We give so that others can know and experience how high, how wide and how deep is the love of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Surely, our cup runneth over.