

The economist says let market forces decide.

The call-center operator asks if you'd mind holding while she finds out for you. (Your call is important to them...)

The IT support person asks if you've tried emptying the glass and then refilling it.

The insomniac will be up all-night wrestling with the question.

The existentialist wonders what is the point of the question?

The nihilist breaks the glass.

A certain US president did not, repeat not, have half-full or half-empty relations with that glass, and regardless of whether the glass is half-full or half-empty, another US president takes the opportunity to declare 'Mission Accomplished'.

And finally, certain whaling nations say they will drink from the glass for scientific research purposes only.

So, having reassessed our situation, was the glass ever empty in the first place?

No, it wasn't. It was full of air. So what did we do by filling it halfway with water?

We emptied half of the air out and, at the same time, replaced it with water.

So actually, the glass is always full... Half full of air and half full of water.

We, just like Jesus, need baptism/water and the Holy Spirit, like the very air we breathe. There are lots of voices with lots of opinions as I just read on a simple matter about water in a glass, so who do we listen to?

The prophet Isaiah reminds us of this in our reading for today from Chapter 43. "Just as the prophet reminded the people of God's call on them, baptism establishes God's claim on the church. The words of God at Jesus' baptism in Luke confirm the relationship between God and the Son. The prophet speaks of the tender relationship between God and God's people, including the church of the baptized. God formed the church, loves the church, calls the church, enables the church to survive to do its work. Even if the church passes through the rivers of controversy and the fires of conflict, God will be present with the church. God's affirmations of Jesus at his baptism confirmed God's work through Jesus, but certainly did not protect Jesus from harm. The church may face danger, but God will be with the church, empowering its ministry and work."¹

That ministry of the church and its work is vital to all of us who are sinners, who once lined up for baptism, and are called to serve today. "**But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian,²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**" (Gal 3:25-27)

What do we make of John's statement that he baptizes with water and Christ would come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire? "John was a minister of water, but Christ the giver of the Holy Spirit; and that his power would be declared by a visible miracle on the day when he would send the Holy Spirit to the apostles under tongues of fire (Acts 2:3)"² That day was Pentecost, but that's still a few weeks away in our church year. Today we celebrate the Lord's baptism as we think about the implications for our own and the work of the Spirit in this time and place.

In closing, I go back to evangelist D.L Moody who once said, "I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."³

How is your glass?

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

¹ Workingpreacher.org Charles L. Aaron

² Institutes, Calvin, 4.15.8

³ J. Kuhatschek, Taking The Guesswork Out of Applying The Bible, IVP, p. 153ff.

First Presbyterian Church- Lynchburg, VA

January 13, 2019

How is Your Glass? - Luke 3:15-17, 21-22/Isaiah 43:1-7

Chad McCain

Opening story: "Speaking to a large audience, D.L. Moody held up a glass and asked, "How can I get the air out of this glass?" One man shouted, "Suck it out with a pump!" Moody replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter the glass." After numerous other suggestions Moody smiled, picked up a pitcher of water, and filled the glass. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then went on to explain that victory in the Christian life is not accomplished by "sucking out a sin here and there," but by being filled with the Holy Spirit."⁴

The people gather with expectations and questions.

John answers and warns them.

Gathering wheat and burning chaff- Jesus has the winnowing fork. The best I can understand is that a winnowing fork is like a pitch fork. "Wind winnowing is an agricultural method developed by ancient cultures for separating grain from chaff. It is also used to remove hay and chaff or other pests from stored grain."⁵ The chief takeaway here is that while Jesus holds the winnowing fork, it is the wind (i.e. the Holy Spirit) who does the work of separating the wheat from the chaff, after Jesus has tossed it in the air.

(***Interesting to note that verses 18-20 are not included in the lectionary reading. It tells more of what happened to John. But here in our reading, the focus is on the end of John the Baptist's work and the beginning of Jesus' work.)

Luke's story is different, but result is the same. Jesus is baptized. When ALL the people were baptized, and when Jesus had also been baptized. Can you almost see it as a line of people lining up to be baptized by John? They come, convicted of their past, or longing to have a Messiah, or both, but there's a need there. The people hope to fill that need, so they go to John. He calls them to baptism and repentance, so they come.

Jesus also comes to be baptized, he gets in line with everyone else.

Note what Jesus says, nothing. Note what Jesus does, he prays.

After he is in prayer, then he is filled with the Holy Spirit. We are told it descends on him, in bodily form, like a dove.

(PAUSE)

How is your glass? Would you say it's half full or half empty? It's a classic question we have likely heard before.

The nature of the answer gets to the heart of our hearts- whether we are an optimist or pessimist, allegedly.

If one takes a glass out of their cupboard, places it in the sink under the tap and fills it to halfway with water, the glass will be half full of water but it would be erroneous to think or even suggest that; the remaining half is empty or is in-some-way worthless. Let's consider how long the average person can live without water, perhaps 5 days at a stretch may be a good estimate. Now, I invite you to think, how long can the average person live without air?

Five minutes perhaps? What is mistaken for nothing, might be more valuable than the water, have we ever stopped to consider that?

(PAUSE)

Today we celebrate and recall the Lord's baptism. I would invite us to recall our own baptism, but chances are many of us were baptized as infants, so it may be a challenge to "remember our baptism"? At the same time, we believe, as John Calvin writes, "Baptism is the sign of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God's children."⁶ Just as Christ was affirmed in verse 22, "**You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.**" So also, God is well pleased with us as we are reckoned, through Christ, to be among God's children.

"Baptism should be a token and proof of our cleansing... But we are not to think that baptism was conferred upon us only for past time, so that for newly committed sins into which we fall after baptism we must seek new remedies

⁴ *Today in the Word*, September, 1991, p. 30.

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnowing>

⁶ Institutes, John Calvin, 4.15.1

of expiation in some other sacraments, as if the force of the former were spent. Therefore, as often as we fall away, we ought to recall the memory of our baptism (or the knowledge that we were baptized in other words) and fortify our mind with it, that we may always be sure and confident of the forgiveness of sins.” (J. Calvin) This doesn’t mean we take liberty in our freedom to sin in the future so that sin may abound; that cheapens grace and is not the way God intended it. Those who do so provoke nothing but God’s wrath and judgment and would be tossed out like chaff.

Think of it not like a glass as we spoke of a moment ago, but as a coffee mug for those of us who drink coffee. In my Navy time, I never met a Navy Chief who would wash out a coffee mug. Despite Natalie’s dismay, I don’t wash my own coffee mug at home or at church. The result is a rather dark brown coffee stain on the inside. I would ask her, and us all, the question of whether that makes my coffee mug any less effective? I would say no. I could argue it adds flavor, but you may not agree... Though there are stains on the inside, the mug itself is still intact and functions to deliver hot liquid bean juice, also known as coffee, or java, or holy joe, etc.

As people who are human, and therefore broken, we have stains inside us, that we carry with us, but Christ keeps us together and washes away our sins, even if a stain may remain. He reinforces us so that we can withstand the stains of life and ways of the world. He keeps our mug from cracking. He keeps us whole, even as we are stained on the inside. Since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us, and he molds us to his purpose and design through Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.

As we come to church, a place where folks come to empty their mugs of old coffee and coffee stains, a place where folks come to have their glasses cleaned, let us recall that we all have stains, that we all have dirt, and that we all need to be cleaned. In theological terms, we all need repentance, forgiveness, and assurance. We all need baptism to help us understand that we are dead to our old ways and alive in Christ, buried with Christ in death and raised to new life. If we are Christians, “**we ought to be dead to sin and alive to righteousness**”. (Rom 6.11)

“Thus, the free pardon of sins and the imputation of righteousness are first promised us, and then the grace of the Holy Spirit given to reform us to new life.”⁷ This same order took place with Jesus. He came and was baptized, prayed, and THEN received the indwelling, the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Then he went and lived out his earthly work and ministry.

This is more than just about us as individuals, or even about us as a church. Recall that in verse 21, it says “**all the people were baptized**”. The Great Commission calls us to go out into the world, baptizing, teaching, making disciples, and remembering.

We live in a broken and hurting world; there are people with some of the same questions and expectations now that the people in verse 15 had back then. “God is present now and always to lure the world towards values and practices that more fully reflect the characteristics of the (heavenly) realm. In this frame of reference, people still need to repent of complicity with brokenness and to join in community with one another and with God in the movement towards a better world.”⁸

How are we complicit in the stains and brokenness of the world? What part have we played in not loving our neighbor as ourselves, not filling up someone’s glass, not giving as we should, or loving as we should? How are we complicit in injustice or poverty or other issues that we face in our city, in our state, in our country? How have we taken liberties in interpreting Scripture? How have we turned the other cheek to look away from the problem that is before us? Granted, this may not be pleasant to think of, but we are called out to be the church going out, not a church coming in. We are called out to **bear fruit worthy of repentance** (Matthew 3.8) and we are called to respond to God’s love by loving one another as he loves us (John 15:17, 1 John 4, Colossians 3).

“In the Gospels and Letters, repentance, baptism, and life in the Holy Spirit have little to do with institutional affiliation (e.g. becoming a member of a church). At one level they are saved from being ruled in the present by brokenness, and from ultimate condemnation at the apocalypse. But from a more important level, according to Luke, those who repent, are baptized and realize they are empowered by the Spirit not only to become part of a movement towards the new world but to invite others to join the movement, to work the signs of the realm, and to embody the qualities of the realm in their common life.”⁹ Are we inviting others to join the movement? Are we so excited about our glass being full that we want to share it with others? There may be a variety of answers to that as there are to the earlier question of whether the glass was half full or empty.

The optimist says the glass is half full. The pessimist says the glass is half empty. And while they are arguing, the pragmatist takes the glass and drinks it.

The engineer says the glass is over-designed for the quantity of water.

The realist says the glass contains half the required amount of liquid for it to overflow.

And the cynic... wonders who drank the other half.

The ground-down mother of a persistently demanding five-year-old says sweetheart it's whatever you want it to be, just please let mommy have five minutes of peace and quiet.

The inquisitive troublemaker wants to know what's in the glass anyhow... and wants the rest of it.

The worrier frets that the remaining half will evaporate by next morning.

The fanatic thinks the glass is completely full, even though it isn't.

The entrepreneur sees the glass as undervalued by half its potential.

The computer specialist says that next year the glass capacity will double, be half the price, but cost you 50% more for me to give you the answer.

The logician says that where the glass is in process of being filled then it is half full; where it is in the process of being emptied then it is half empty; and where its status in terms of being filled or emptied is unknown then the glass is one in which a boundary between liquid and gas lies exactly midway between the inside bottom and the upper rim, assuming that the glass has parallel sides and rests on a level surface, and where it does not then the liquid/gas boundary lies exactly midway between the upper and lower equal halves of the available total volume of said glass.

The scientist says a guess based on a visual cue is inaccurate, so mark the glass at the bottom of the meniscus of the content, pour the content into a bigger glass; fill the empty glass with fresh content up to the mark; add the original content back in; if the combined content overflows the lip, the glass was more than half full; if it doesn't reach the top, the glass was more than half empty; if it neither overflows nor fails to reach the top then it was either half-full or half-empty. Now what was the question again?

The grammarian says that while the terms half-full and half-empty are colloquially acceptable the glass can technically be neither since both full and empty are absolute states and therefore are incapable of being halved or modified in any way.

The auditor first checks whether the empty half is material and then designs the audit procedures to obtain enough evidence to conclude that the glass is indeed empty.

The waiter will hurry to replace the glass with a full one. For him there are no doubts: the glass was empty when he took it away; it is full in the bill that he brings you.

The magician will show you the glass with the full half at the top.

The phobic says yuck, someone drank out of it and left his germs on the glass.

The boss expects the half-empty glass to be filled in half the time it took to fill half the glass, at half the going rate.

The drill sergeant says make the glass do push-ups until it sweats itself full!!!

The actor says, "Whatever the director wants it to be - or not to be..."

The politician says that under the last government the glass was half-empty, and becoming emptier, but thanks to his own party's new leadership, the glass is now half-full, and becoming fuller; but if the other party were to return to power, the glass would once again undoubtedly empty rapidly.

⁷ Institutes, John Calvin, 4.15.4

⁸ Workingpreacher.org, Ronald J. Allen

⁹ Workingpreacher.org, Ronald J. Allen.