"Two Cups" June 28, 2026
Matthew 10:40-42, 20:20-28 Westminster, Greenville
5th Sunday after Pentecost Ben Dorr
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This morning, I'd like to talk with you about cups.
I know…that may sound like something of a bland topic.
A bit too mundane or mediocre to hold your attention for 15-20 minutes.

But stay with me.

What comes to your mind,
when you're in this sanctuary,
and your preacher is asking you to consider your relationship with cups?

One of the first things that comes to my mind is the splendid sermon that Mary Kathleen preached not too long ago…do you remember? The one in which she had all those stainless-steel Stanley cups, balanced around the pulpit?

I don't think I'll ever forget that sermon.

Maybe your mind goes to scripture.
And you recall the words of Psalm 23:

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over…"

What comes to your mind, when you sit in this room and consider what it means to hold a cup, to offer a cup, to drink from a cup?

I hope that's not a bland or boring question.
All sorts of things can happen with a cup when we're in church.

So…I'd like you to consider two cups this morning.
The first is in our first text for today, Jesus says:

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me…and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones…truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

What's Jesus talking about?
The cup of hospitality.
The ways that we welcome other people into our lives and into the life of this church.

- It's why we have 5 greeters and a team of ushers lined up every Sunday morning.

- It's why we have our outstanding office volunteers who rotate being in the main office on Sunday mornings, just in case a visitor comes through our doors and wonders where they can find the nursery.

- It's why we have a quiet, behind-the-scenes sanctuary clean-up team, who comes into this sanctuary every single week to straighten everything up and make sure that it's just right for Sunday mornings.

You see, there's a long history of holding this first cup, offering this cup of hospitality, in God's Church.

Do you know the name Benedict of Nursia?

Benedict lived in the 5th and 6th centuries, he was an Italian monk and the founder of the Order of Saint Benedict. He wrote a list of instructions for his monastic community.

It is now known as the Rule of St. Benedict.
And one of the main themes is hospitality.

In the Middle Ages in particular, if you were poor, hurting, or on a journey, you would rejoice when you came across a Benedictine monastery because you knew that they would give you shelter and welcome you.

And one of the most important jobs in the monastery, according to Benedict, was the job of porter.

A porter's job was to stay near the door and welcome strangers. The porter would spend their waking hours scanning the horizon for guests. They would sleep near the gates so that they would be right there, at the ready should a stranger arrive in the middle of the night.

And when a guest did arrive, it was the job of the porter to welcome the guest not as a stranger, but as if that person was Jesus himself!

The porter would exclaim, “Praise be to God,” and then the porter would bow down and kiss the stranger’s feet, as if he were kissing the feet of Jesus, rejoicing that Jesus was there.

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Now I’m not suggesting that we start kissing each other’s feet.
I am asking you to consider the cup of hospitality.

What would it look like for you to treat every person in this room that you don’t know, and is a stranger to you…as if they might be Jesus?

Hospitality is not just part of the rule of St. Benedict.
It's also one of the pillars of Westminster, listed in your bulletin.

And where can you find it on our list of pillars?
At the top.
It's number one.

So, the first thing I'd invite you to do is consider the ways that you can offer this cup around here.

How can you extend hospitality to the couple who just moved to Greenville this past spring and they are here today, looking for a church home?

How can you offer a word of welcome to the person who barely made it to church today, because their life feels so overwhelming, when they are at home?

Maybe the visitor sitting behind you this morning is someone who was previously wounded by another church, and today is their first time back in church in 15 years…

Perhaps you remember the challenge I gave you a few years ago? How can you find five new people in this room that you do not know right now, and get to know them by the end of this year, help them to feel at home?

I remember someone who felt so welcome, so at home in his church, he did something I would never have dreamed that an elder would do.

It happened at the church in which I grew up in Michigan.

The member, this elder, he was good friends with the pastor of my home church. And this elder was in charge of preparing the communion elements on a particular Sunday.

After the elements were on the table, my former pastor started to say the liturgy:

"Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God,"—and then…he smelled something unusual.

So he got to the next line, "People will come from east and from west," he took another whiff—and thought to himself yes, that's definitely WINE that I smell.

Now I've served churches that will offer wine during communion, and I've served churches that never offer wine during communion. At the church in which I grew up, it was like here:

NO WINE during communion.

So my former pastor, he wonders what's going on…and then he catches a glance at his friend who had prepared the elements, and his friend was sitting there, biting his lower lip, stifling a grin.

Well, this could be a disaster, right?

All those little cups filled with what's supposed to be grape juice, and now perhaps some of them have wine—so, as my former pastor went into the words of institution, he started sniffing the trays:

"This is my body, broken for you…"
No wine there.
"Do this in remembrance of me."
No wine there.

And then, finally, it dawned on him.

He took the pitcher that he was about to pour, took another breath:
YES, THAT'S where the wine was!

Not in the cups where it would get to the congregation, but only in the pitcher…

So my former pastor took the pitcher,
and he poured the chalice almost full,
and he held the cup: "This is my blood, poured out for you,"
and looking directly at his friend, he gulped down the entire cup!

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Now I don't want any of you getting ideas there!
But cups are not boring.
They are never boring, when you come to church.

Because the cup of hospitality is not the only cup I would like for you to consider today.

There's a second cup.
It's in our second text.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him… 'Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.'

But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?'

Take a good look at this cup.

This cup isn't just about welcoming others in the name of Jesus.
This cup has something to do with suffering for the sake of Jesus.

It has something to do with making a sacrifice.
With taking up a cross.

How does it feel to hold this second cup?
To consider Christ's invitation to drink from this cup?

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Some of you may recall that the last time that the World Cup was hosted by the United States was over 30 years ago, in 1994. In the second game of the opening round, the U.S. team faced Colombia.

With the score knotted at zeros, Colombian defender Andres Escobar tried to deflect a ball out of bounds. But instead of kicking it out, he accidentally kicked the ball into his own goal.

It gave the U.S. a 1-0 lead, and Colombia never recovered. They lost the match, and they ended up failing to qualify for the second round of play.

Escobar, the captain, an exquisite player, was devastated.
What was difficult for Escobar, however, soon became tragic.

Colombian drug traffickers had bet lots of money on Colombia to win the World Cup.

Shortly after returning to Colombia, Escobar was at a local club when he was shot and killed by a drug cartel. It was a death that rocked the country. Thousands lined the street with Escobar's coffin, and the President made a speech to the country, with Escobar's grieving family in the front row.

How does one go on, in the face of such a senseless killing?

Escobar grew up in a devoutly Catholic household, and one could see that faith at work in his adult years. According to one person, Escobar was someone who believed that soccer fields could be places of forgiveness. In a land that was SOAKED with violence, Escobar saw soccer as offering a different world of play and peace.

And so it happened, after his team was eliminated, Escobar wrote a letter to his country, published in a national newspaper.

The end of the letter went like this:

"Let us please maintain respect.
My warmest regards to everyone.
We'll see each other again soon, because life doesn't end here."

What Escobar had no way of knowing was that those words—
"life doesn't end here"—
would still be hanging like a balloon in the air,
after he was killed:

Life does not end here.

Those five words became a beacon of hope for all who knew him…

His sister, Maria Ester, was enraged by his death…but she finally refused to live with anger and bitterness.

"Eventually," she said, "life leads to Andres' words. No matter how difficult, we must stand back up.

Spend our time trying to stop someone else's suffering.

Life doesn't end here."[1]

And what did she do with the cup that Jesus gave her?

The family of Andres Escobar went on to start the Andres Escobar Social Project, a soccer program to help youngsters from poor neighborhoods avoid becoming involved in the gangs, drugs and violence surrounding them.

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THAT'S the second cup.
And it's not a natural instinct to drink that cup, is it?

Who wants to hold the cup that leads to sacrifice?
Who wants to sip from the cup that takes us to the cross?

And yet, as the late priest Henri Nouwen once wrote, this second cup is, in fact, a paradox.

It has two sides.

"We need to remind each other," he said, "that the cup of sorrow is also the cup of joy, that precisely what causes us sadness can become the fertile ground for gladness. Indeed, we need to be angels for each other, to give each other strength…"[2]

THROUGH THIS CUP…

Do you know what that's like?

For angels to come to you, offering you Christ's cup of grace and strength, when you needed it most?

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[1] This story comes from "The Two Escobars," a documentary in ESPN's "30 for 30" series.
[2] Henri Nouwen, "Can You Drink the Cup?", Notre Dame, IN: Ava Maria Press, 1996.

In a recent interview, the poet and writer, Christian Wiman, spoke about what happened three years ago when his cancer had returned and it was possible that he would die.

"I had a clinical trial, and I had to go to Boston for a number of weeks. Because we still had our life in New Haven, my wife couldn't come because she had to take care of the kids and do her job. So I had two longtime friends, who both came for weeks at a time. It was an extraordinary experience.

"Neither is Christian, but I felt the presence of Christ in our relationships like a flame. It [was] to me so real, and so full of meaning at such a desperate time…

In those friendships, he said, "the world was lit up and my relationships with other people were lit up…

"I have no need for them to see that as Christ…But [Christ] was present for me."[3]

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I wonder if the two cups we've been talking about today, of hospitality and sacrifice, are really the same cup. Just different ways of holding and sharing the cup that is filled with the love of Christ.

I wonder what that cup looks like in your life right now.
Will you hold that cup in your heart for just a moment?

Is it a cup that means forgiving the person who has wounded you?
Is it a cup that requires you to speak the truth in love, even though it will be hard to do?

[3] Peter Wehner, "There Was Love, and Then There Was Suffering': A Q&A With Christian Wiman," *The New York Times*, June 21, 2026.

Is it a cup in which Jesus is asking you to step out of your comfort zone, and try something new?

Is it a cup in which all you can do is throw yourself into the arms of God, because you don't know what the future holds for a loved one, or what it holds for you?

I don't know the nature of the cup you're holding in your heart at this moment.

I do know this.

If the cup comes from Jesus, it comes from the One who has loved you since before the worlds were created. It comes from the One who died for you…and was raised for you…and whose grace is surrounding you, even when you cannot see it.

Don't be afraid.
Don't be afraid to drink the cup
that Christ has given you…

Amen.