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A Drop in the Bucket

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Texts: John 15:26-27; 16:7-11 (B – Day of Pentecost)

Usually “a drop in the bucket” is not a very good thing. We toss it in there with “too little, too late” and “it makes no difference.” These are not expressions we want to hear very often, and hopefully don’t have to use much. When used of good things in life, or of good efforts people make to help or change things for the better, “a drop in the bucket” is not an impressive thing.

But here at Zion we’re coming to understand a different meaning of “a drop in the bucket.” This spring has brought several inches of rain – just at the time when we were about to finish repairing our leaky roof. Our faithful and dedicated janitor has tried diligently to put buckets under those leaks, and we’ve caught a lot of drops in the buckets! The first drop is the loudest, and gradually the bucket fills up – to the point where each drop that is caught splashes two or three back out!

That might just be a parable of the way the Holy Spirit works in the church....

Truth is, that’s what we are, a drop in the bucket: 150 or so gathered out of what, 15,000? That’s just a drop in the bucket! Yet if the Holy Spirit gathers enough drops together, then the very next drop is maybe going to produce a splash which waters the world with truth and grace! That’s what the Celebrate 2000 gathering yesterday was: getting enough churches and Christians together in the bucket to make a little splash over into Southern Saskatchewan. For all the rain we’ve been getting,

Southern Saskatchewan sure could use some faith splashing over the land, don't you think? Especially in that 14-55 age group.

Of course, the kind of splash we make is very important. Our carpet and ceiling tiles in the narthex are stained because of the drops splashing. Is it a stain we want to make on people's minds and hearts and lives when we are "splashed out of the bucket," so to speak? A dirty stain, the stain of anger, the stain of hurt, the stain of betrayal, the stain of vindictiveness and revenge? Do we want to be known as judgmental and self-righteous, as belligerent and hard to get along with?

I don't think we do, because we know that Jesus sends us out into the world as witnesses of his love. He warns his disciples even as he promises them the Holy Spirit: "The world will hate you just as it hated me. But be happy! I have overcome the world! And be happy that I am going away, because I will send the Holy Spirit to help you love even those who hate you! Love them into the Kingdom of God with your witness in word and deed to me and my love for you!" That's the kind of splash we want to make!

Still, there is a stern side to this love. Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes, it will remind us of sin and righteousness and judgment. These are not things people like to hear about and they are not things we like to think about. Aren't they the very things that contribute to giving Christians a bad name?

Besides, surely going on about sin and righteousness and judgment is a waste of time. When the church of Jesus Christ spends a lot of energy condemning the world, or preaching to the world about right and wrong, and trying to get the world to admit its sinfulness – aren't we wasting our time? These are very natural, human things to do and we are every one of us experts at it with absolutely no help from the Holy Spirit. I do not need the Holy Spirit to tell me when someone has sinned against me: my feelings for getting even tell me right away! And I do not need the Holy Spirit to tell me when I have not measured up to the standard: the coach, the teacher, the boss, the creditor – lots of people in lots of ways, including my peers and even my best friends and family members – will let me know soon enough. Nor do I need any help from the Holy Spirit to know the difference between right and wrong, or to be able to judge my behaviour as right or wrong: the consequences speak for themselves when I get caught, and if I don't get caught, there's my guilty conscience to convict me. When the church of Jesus Christ wades

into this filthy water, is it abandoning the mission of love Jesus sends us out to accomplish, as well as grieving and shackling the Holy Spirit, too? Our job is to make a splash of grace wherever we happen to land! And it doesn't have to be a big splash; after all, we are just a drop in the bucket.

So, then, how are we to understand sin, righteousness, and judgment? It IS Pentecost Sunday, so we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is here to help us enter into the Truth. So let's look more closely. What is it we are to say about sin? "That the world does not believe in Jesus." And what is it that we are to say about righteousness? "That Jesus goes to the Father and we see him no more." And what are we to say about the judgment? That "the ruler of this world is judged." And I tell you, by the power of the Holy Spirit these three words add up, in truth, to GRACE! And a FLOOD of grace!

Imagine the next argument over some sin you committed or someone committed against you. Imagine the conversation if even one person allows the Holy Spirit to lead their words. How this situation relates to believing in Jesus will be very much on your mind – and if it's on your mind, it will be in your prayers; and if in your prayers, then soon on your lips; and the sin, whatever it was, won't seem nearly so important to get fixed because the realization that Jesus died for MY OWN sins – some of which are probably very much worse than this one – will outweigh most of the anger and hurt and bitterness with a love and a compassion to see faith in Jesus grow. And what if both persons in the argument believe in Jesus and they both let the Holy Spirit guide them? It's almost too good to be true – but it is!

And imagine the next discussion of right and wrong, of ethical choices, of the difficulties of deciding what to do with integrity and honesty and truth as we struggle with our own weaknesses and aspirations and our own desires for dignity and stature. Would we be so harsh on ourselves or on others if we let the Holy Spirit guide us with the thought of the absence of Jesus? What would Jesus do? is the right question, and it is a question that should drive anyone who asks it into their Bible, onto their knees, and to the church to talk with other Christians more mature than themselves. Because Jesus is not here in the flesh to answer it, it is by the promptings and the mysterious insights of the Holy Spirit that we struggle with our choices. Realizing this helps us be so much more gracious to one another, even for our moral failures.

And imagine what judgment becomes when the Holy Spirit guides

our judgment. When the wrong is done, the sin committed, and the guilty caught, the Holy Spirit gives this gift: to know the source of wrong behind the wrong choice, to realize the Deceiver first deceived the one who tried deceiving others, to understand that the wrongdoer is not caught in their own net but in the net of the Destroyer, Satan, Lucifer, the Devil. And then to hear these resounding words of life: The ruler of this world is judged! Judged and defeated by the cross of Christ! Judged and overcome by the Resurrection! Judged and soon to be banished!

This is the work of the Holy Spirit: that we may be able to love the sinner even while hating the sin; that we may be able to discipline without judging and condemning; that we may be able to offer another chance even while trusting ourselves to the goodness of God.

It might be just a drop in the bucket, but it is a drop of grace! And like the ripples that one drop makes on a pond, so can the drops of grace bounced from our faithful hearts start ripples the like of which may never end!

Come, Holy Spirit! Amen!