

A Parable for Ministry
Giving from an Overflowing Heart
Pitcher, Cup, Saucer and Plate - Part 1
Children's Story - 9/13/2003
Calimesa SDA Church

(*the imagery of the Pitcher, Cup, Saucer and Plate was first developed by Chuck Miller, and is used here with gratefulness for his contribution, and apologies for any way this parable fails to do the imagery justice)

Introduction to the Parable:

How many of you have ever had anything in your house that filled up and overflowed? Maybe it was a sink or bath tub. Or maybe a trash can. Or the basket you put your dirty clothes in. It might even have been a dresser drawer, or something else around the house. Sometimes when things fill up and overflow it can be kind of messy. But other times it can be kind of nice, and even fun. Like, for example, when fountains fill up and overflow - that can be really neat! Or when you are so excited about something it is hard to sit still, and you just have to talk about it. Or when you get the giggles, and you begin to fill up until it overflows and you can't stop laughing.

Jesus liked to talk about things that filled up and overflowed. Once He said, "*out of the fullness of our hearts, our mouths speak*" ((What our hearts are full of, will overflow in what we like to talk about). Another time when He was talking to a woman by a well, He told her that following Him would be like a spring of water that would bubble up inside of her and overflow.

In fact, one of the ways that this church family talks about what it means to follow Jesus, is by using a pitcher, cup, saucer and plate to describe it. Jesus, Who is represented by the pitcher, pours His love into our lives (we are the cup) as we spend time with Him, and as we fill up with God's love, we overflow on to the saucer, (The saucer are the people whose lives we touch). And then as we learn to do that well, then, and only then, the saucer begins to overflow into all the other programs and activities that churches do. ***When*** we get the order right, ***then*** we are able to experience what Jesus was talking about, and that is great fun!

BUT FOR THIS MORNING, we're going to start by talking about just the cup (which represents you and me), and the pitcher. We're going to read you a short story about a cup, that could be just like any of the cups you have at home, and in some ways, might even be a lot like some of you, or someone you know. While the story is being read, you will want to both listen carefully and watch what we do with the cup and pitcher here.

The Story: The Pitcher, Cup, Saucer and Plate - Part 1

Once upon a time, there was a little cup who more than anything else wanted to feel very full and very happy deep down inside. Now when you are a little cup living in a cupboard with a lot of other cups, plates and dishes, you

might hear all kinds of things being said. Sometimes, when the other cups, dishes and plates talked to each other, you could hear them saying things like:

“If you want to be truly happy, then you need to have lots of stuff on your plate all the time, the more the better!”

Others said, “I think true happiness comes when you are constantly pouring out whatever you have for others until there is nothing left to give.”

This usually made the cup feel stressed, or very tired.

Still others said “You are only really happy when someone pours bubbly fizzy stuff inside of you. That sounded sort of interesting to the cup, but the cup wasn’t sure it really wanted to feel all bubbly and fizzy all the time.

Still others always seemed to be talking about how important it is to get a good regular scrubbing, or how horrible it would be to be seen with other cups and saucers that didn’t match.

But then one day, someone told this cup that to be really happy it ought to share what it had with others. That seemed to make more sense than many of the other things it was hearing. So one day, when it was feeling exceptionally full, it began to share what it had with others. It poured out some of its fullness, and that felt pretty good. So it poured out some more, and some more . . . but then something happened. It began to notice that it wasn’t as full as it was before. The cup began to get worried. The cup began to be more careful, only pouring out a little at a time so it wouldn’t run out. And then, when it had almost nothing left to give at all, someone who knew just the right words to say, convinced it to give its last drop, which sort of felt good and bad and confusing all at the same time.

Now that the cup was completely dry, it ran back to the pitcher and got filled up again. But before long, the same thing began to happen. And it was not long before it was empty once again. At first, this didn’t seem to bad. But as time went on, the little cup began to get very tired from running back and forth, and feeling like it was always running out, and hardly ever very full.

One day, when the little cup was feeling especially empty and dry, it got an idea. Since it wanted to feel more full, maybe what it needed was more stuff in the cup. So the little cup got very busy and began to plan lots of things to do, and to buy all kinds of things to put in the cup to make it feel fuller. And, it worked . . . sort of. The cup did feel fuller, but now when it went to the pitcher, there was so much other stuff in the cup that the pitcher could not pour in as much as before. So while the cup looked fuller, when it came to giving to others, it really had a lot less to give than before. The cup was now very busy, and looked very important, but, deep down inside, well, it just didn’t hold as much as it used to.

Then one day when the cup came to see the pitcher (for the cup was feeling very dry again, as it often did), the pitcher said,

“Little cup”

“Yes,” said the cup

“I’ve noticed you are always so busy running back and forth, and that you are beginning to look tired,” said the pitcher.

“Yes,” said the cup, “I know I am supposed to share what I have with others, but it is hard work, and there are so many things inside me that take up so much space, well, I am always afraid I am going to run out. Sometimes I feel full, but much of the time I feel empty too.”

“There is an easier way,” said the pitcher.

“I know, I could stop giving what I have, and I guess I wouldn’t be so tired,” said the cup.

“You wouldn’t have to stop giving,” said the pitcher

“But wouldn’t I run out?” said the cup.

“No,” smiled the pitcher, “in fact you will have even more.”

“How can that be?” asked the little cup

“Don’t just come to me when you feel thirsty and run away as soon as you drink,” said the pitcher, “stay with me. Keep on following me, Instead of draining yourself, give out of the overflow.”

The little cup was not sure what the Pitcher meant, but the cup did decide to stay with the pitcher. And, as it did, something remarkable began to happen. As the pitcher continued to pour into the little cup, it began to overflow. And no matter how much the cup shared, it was staying full, because it was giving out of the overflow. Because the cup was staying close to the pitcher, it remained full as it gave.

And you know what? A strange thing began to happen. As the pitcher continued to pour into the cup, and as the cup began to overflow, all of the busy-ness and all the other stuff that had gotten into the cup and was taking up so much space, and which had crowded out so much of the fresh water from the pitcher, began to slowly wash away. The little cup didn’t need them anymore to feel full. And now it could hold even more of God’s love and goodness. And as long as the little cup stayed with the pitcher, it never needed to worry about running out as it overflowed and happily splashed God’s love on those around it.

The little cup was no longer giving in order to feel full . . . it was giving because it was.

A Parable for Ministry
A Paradigm for Ministry
Pitcher, Cup, Saucer and Plate - Part II
Children's Story - 11/8/2003
Calimesa SDA Church

(*the imagery of the Pitcher, Cup, Saucer and Plate was first developed by Chuck Miller, and is used here with gratefulness for his contribution, and apologies for any way this parable fails to do the imagery justice)

Introduction to the Parable:

Some of you will remember that the last time we had all this stuff up here, we were talking about things that overflowed. Things like sinks, bathtubs, trash cans, dirty close baskets, dresser drawers, and all kinds of things. And we said that sometimes overflowing can be messy, but that sometimes it can be kind of nice or even fun. Like fountains, for example, or when we get excited, or just have a good laugh. And we noticed that Jesus said that following Him was often like that; being filled up with His love until it begins to overflow to the people around us. He said it was like a spring of water that wells upside, and flows out all over the place in nice ways! And we also said that one of the ways that this church family describes what it means to follow Jesus, is by using a pitcher, cup, saucer and plate. Remember these?

The pitcher, which represents Jesus, pours God's love and grace into our lives (we are the cup) as we spend time with Him, and as we fill up, we begin to overflow into the saucer (which represents the people in our lives. Our families, friends, church members and neighbors, and people we don't even know). And then as the saucer also fills, it too, overflows into the plate. The plate represents all the things we plan and do as a church family.

Now the last time, we told you a story that was just about the pitcher and the cup. But today, we are going to tell you a little about the saucer and plate as well. So let's listen to the story being read once again, and as you listen, watch and see what we do with pitcher, cup, saucer and plate.

The Pitcher, Cup, Saucer & Plate - Part II

Once upon a time, there was a little cup, who had learned in our previous story that the way to be very full and very happy was to stay close to the pitcher. This was not always easy to remember, because living in a cupboard with lots of other cups, plates and dishes who didn't always understand this, could be very distracting. Sometimes the little cup would forget. But the pitcher was always very glad when the cup remembered where it belonged.

Sometimes, when the little cup got distracted, it would get very silly thoughts. Once it got to thinking that it was some kind of super hero, who could do everything all by itself. It would run all through the cupboard, kitchen and

dining areas, splashing all over the place. This of course was very exciting. But when it had calmed down a bit to take a breath, the cup heard the pitcher calling out to it.

“Little Cup!” called the Pitcher

“Yes”, said the cup.”

“What *was* all that, that you were just doing?”, inquired the Pitcher.

“Oh, wasn’t it great!?”, said the cup, “I’ve just been splashing all over the place.”

“You certainly have,” said the Pitcher, “But, you know, that’s not exactly what I had in mind.”

“But I thought I was *supposed* to share,” said the cup.

“Well,” said the Pitcher, “First of all, overflowing is not something I have asked you to do alone. Remember, you are part of a set not just one lone cup doing its own thing. Besides, I think many of those that were splashed may have been more annoyed than they were refreshed.”

“Oh,” said the cup. “Then what *should* I do?”

“Well,” said the Pitcher, “you can start by finding your place right there in the middle of the saucer, which is the place that is specially made to hold cups.”

Then, as the cup found it’s place there in the saucer, and as the pitcher poured into the cup and it began to overflow, not only was the saucer refreshed, but the cup discovered that, supported by the saucer, it was less likely to lose its balance and tip over. And as the pitcher continued to pour, it was not long before the saucer also began to fill up so that it too was ready to overflow. And at this point, the saucer did a very sensible thing. It asked the pitcher what it should do.

The Pitcher replied, “Have you considered the plate? It too is a part of the set you belong to.”

“How can the plate help?”, asked the cup and saucer together.

“The plate,” said the Pitcher, “Is what holds all the things we plan and do in order to reach out to others, and invite them to join us.”

“Great!” said the cup and saucer together. “Let’s get ourselves a plate and get started!”

“But remember,” the Pitcher said, “the plate is only there to support you in what I am calling you to do. You do not serve the plate, you serve only Me.”

Well the cup and saucer were very excited, and took their place right in the middle of the plate, which did indeed support them quite well. Before long, as the saucer began to overflow into the plate, all kinds of nice ways to care for others began to happen. Some started singing bands. Others taught children about the Pitcher. Others began helping those in need. All kinds of exciting things began to happen as the pitcher filled the cup, and the saucer, which then overflowed into the plate.

For awhile everything went very well, But then a strange thing began to happen. The plate was looking so nice and so exciting, that some began to start showing it off to others. People could be heard bragging about the plate, and comparing it to other plates. If they saw that other plates, particularly if they were famous plates, had things that their plate didn't, then they wanted to have them too. They wanted their plate to be as big, and shiny, and exciting as the other plates, which of course they felt they must do if they were going to be able to compete for their share of the kitchen. And once again, they began to do very silly things.

Forgetting that the plate was just one part of a much bigger set, they began loading it down with all kinds of stuff that they thought all good plates should have. Before long, there were more things to do than there were people who felt called to do them, or who fully understood why they were happening. But now that there was so much stuff on the plate to manage, that committees had to be organized just to take care of it all, and to try to convince the cup and saucer that it was their job to support the plate.

Before anyone knew quite what was happening, things began to turn wrong side up. Instead of the cup and saucer resting on the plate the way the Pitcher had said, the plate was now on top, and the cup and saucer were trying to hold it up. The bigger the plate got, the more important it seemed . . . and the smaller and less important the saucer and cup seemed . . . and there wasn't much time left to think a lot about the Pitcher, except maybe as a nice design to put on the plate. Sadly, with the plate on top, it was now much harder for the pitcher to pour into the cup and saucer . . . and what had once been a joy for them, now seemed more like a job.

Then one day, as the cup and saucer were doing what they could to support a rather heavy plate, they began to hear a still small voice once again.

“Listen, “ said the cup, “I think it is the voice of the Pitcher.”

And indeed it was.

“What are you doing down there?” said the Pitcher.

“Why, we're doing our best to support this plate” the cup and saucer replied.

“Why are you doing it from down there?” asked the Pitcher, “Have you forgotten what I called you to do?”

“Didn’t you tell us that the plate was part of the set we were made for?” asked the cup and saucer.

“Indeed I did,” answered the Pitcher, “But you’re not here to support the plate, the plate is there to support you and what I am doing in your lives, so you can overflow. Have you been overflowing much lately?”

“I guess not,” said the cup and saucer, “You see, it is hard to find a way for that to happen with the plate between us and you.”

“Well then,” said the Pitcher kindly, “Why don’t you come on out from under there, and go back to where I called you to in the first place.”

As the cup and saucer crawled out from under the plate, took their places back where they belonged, and looked back toward the Pitcher once again, not only did they begin to feel full once more, but they also started to remember the real reason they had become interested in the plate in the first place. The cup and the saucer looked up to the Pitcher and said,

“We are sorry that we allowed the plate to become more important than the people around us, and most of all, that we let the plate become more important than you.”

But you know, the Pitcher was very kind and gracious, and said, “Remember, as helpful as plates may be when they are in their proper place, only cups and saucers will be with Me in heaven.”

And as long as the cup, saucer and plate stayed arranged the way the pitcher had told them, so the love of God could pour in and overflow, they brought joy to the heart of the Pitcher, and great joy to others as well. And as long as they remembered what the Pitcher said, and actually did put it into practice, they really did live quite happily ever after.