

Once, a long time ago,
there was a wise Zen master.

People from far and near would seek his counsel and ask for his wisdom.
Many would come and ask him to teach them,
To enlighten them in the way of Zen.

Like Jesus, this Zen Master
seldom turned any away.

One day an important man,
a man used to command and obedience came to visit the master.

“I have come today
to ask you to teach me about Zen.
Open my mind to enlightenment.”

The tone of the important man’s voice
was one used to getting his own way.
The Zen master smiled
and said that they should discuss the matter over a cup of tea.

When the tea was served the master poured his visitor a cup.
He poured and he poured and the tea rose to the rim
and began to spill over the table
and finally onto the robes of the wealthy man.

Finally the visitor shouted,
“Enough.
You are spilling the tea all over.
Can’t you see the cup is full?”

The master stopped pouring and smiled at his guest.
“You are like this tea cup,
so full that nothing more can be added.
Come back to me when the cup is empty.
Come back to me with an empty mind.”

According to the Apostle Paul,
from our reading in Philippians
Jesus is a lot like the tea cup.

He emptied himself of all his divine prerogatives as God
and became human like one of us.

He emptied himself even of the good things
so that he could take on the best thing,
to experience death AND life as we experience it.

The result?
Christ received new and unending life,
Abundant life
and the ability to share that life
with those who follow him.

If Christ had not emptied himself,
Christ could not have shared that abundant life with us.

Paul says also,
that our lives are like that tea cup also.

Unless we empty ourselves,
becoming willing to receive all that life has to give,
we will remain dead,
unable to share in that new life.

But today,
the moment we empty ourselves,
and become willing to receive,
like that tea cup
that is the moment we begin to really live.

We let go of the problems and issues that bother us.
Tasks uncompleted and uncompleteable,
Lost hopes,
Failures,
Angers,
Frustrations,
Grief.

All of these we empty out of our cup.

But we also let go of the good things that delight us,

the things in our lives we grasp for
with all our strength,
our possessions,
our families,
our good name,
our work,
our leisure.

All these good things also need to go
To make room for the new life God intends.

The irony of it is,
once we are emptied,
like Christ,
we are given it all back by God
as Christ was-
new life poured into us-

not just for a moment
or for an hour,
or for a day,
or for a week,

but for all of life
and overflowing into eternity,
good measure,
shaken down,
pressed together,
overflowing,
life.

Let's just take a few moments of quiet-
eyes closed
hands in her lap's plans upraised-
our cupped hands like a teacup.

Now imagine whatever is in your life right now filling that cup.

The good things –
the joys
the tasks completed-
the pleasures enjoyed.
Flowing into the cup.

Now also imagine the challenges
the problems
the worries.
Flowing into the cup.

See them intermingle.
They are there in your hand
in that tea cup.

Now give them to God.

Ask God to empty you
Of all that fills the teacup of your life.

And ask God to fill you,
that you may be brim full again with
new life
new Hope
new projects
new Joys.

Have this mind in yourselves
which was also in Christ Jesus
that he emptied himself
taking the form of a servant.

And because of that emptying,
God has filled him with new life,
And that life spills over to us.

God will fill us,
God will use us.
Amen.