

To be vessel and passage

**We receive a gift to carry and pour out to others.
We are carved into channels through which God
flows love.**

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Right now are the waning days of pregnancy. Contractions come and go. Intense, then subsiding. I can't walk without waddling. Sleep is fitful, restless. Comfort is elusive. I wake a hundred times.

Every morning the kids ask if the baby will be born today. No one knows. **These are my last days to carry, to be a vessel. Soon I will become the passage.**

Each time the priest lifts high the cup and plate, intoning the thundering prayer I've heard for decades, I try to understand. What does it mean for God to be held in human hands? To offer us a way to become holy?

Eucharist is vessel and passage. Jesus said I am the Cup of Life and I am the Way, and people were so startled by his strange words that they remembered them, recited them under breath a thousand times, wrote them down and passed them on, pressed them into the hands of others saying, see? It is all here. If you can try to understand. If you can believe.

What I believe is this. We gather with strangers, we take bread and wine, we pray over food and drink, the Holy turns it into body and blood, we chew and sip it together. It is the strangest moment of my week. The strangest thing I do with other humans.

We share one cup and it is accepted, which we do nowhere else. (Germs! Personal space! Me me me!) We chew the smallest piece of bread and it is enough, which we do nowhere else. (Super-size me! Seconds! More!)

Then we kneel down and watch other people eat and drink. Some of them are so reverent you want to cry, and some of them are so bored you want to shake them awake, and most of us reach out to take and eat and drink with such aching need, such secret suffering, such loneliness and searching and yearning that you can believe all over again in a God who knew we needed flesh and blood to remind our flesh and blood how wildly loved we are.

Only when Eucharist is poured out from the vessel, broken and shared, does it do what he told us it would do. Remind us of him. Draw us back to him. Make us his body, together.

Bread and wine to body and blood. Chewed by our mealy mouths and swallowed by our germy lips. Eucharist is earthy and embodied. I do not understand it and never will and it is still, strangely, shiveringly, the sacred everything of my week.

There are two ways to birth a baby. You can push with blood, sweat, and tears until you are certain you are dying and breaking open from pain and no one else seems to recognize this suffering—and then the child slips out with astonishing wet wonder, both of you yelping for air as you begin to breathe, anew.

Or you can let a surgeon take a scalpel to slice your numbed skin, peel back layers of muscle and fat, and pull forth the child from the cavern as you lie on the table, strapped down, stuck full of tubes to keep you calm and still, ears and eyes straining to hear a mewling cry that will tell you the baby is born and safe.

I have had both births. Both transformations from vessel to passage. I can tell you they are both terrifying and holy. Choice and control and any illusion you carried into the prospect of parenting are ripped away. You are given your first earthy taste that motherhood will look and feel drastically different from you expected.

You did not know you had to be broken open like this. You did not know what it would feel like to hold tight and to let go, all at once. Which is why birth prepares you for everything that comes next. You will repeat this over and over again.

Motherhood means this: to be a vessel and to be a passage. To carry a child within you (womb or heart, both ache the same). To pour yourself out over and over out of love. To let yourself be broken open so that they might draw forth life. To be a way that guides a child forward. To accept your temporary status as source of shelter, comfort, and protection. To become a channel of love, as the poet wrote:

You make yourself a way / For love to reach the ground.

Actually it is much more than motherhood. **Actually it is the shape of every calling.**

We receive a gift to carry and to pour out to others. We are carved into channels of grace through which God flows love. Our lives are not held fast and tight and safe for us alone. We are broken apart, over and over, and through the cracks we catch glimpses of the mysteries of living and dying.

This is body and blood, this is birth and resurrection, this is everything we are moving reaching working grasping aching waddling toward. And for one fleeting second each Sunday when I watch the children I love most and strangers I do not know stretch out their hands and take from a vessel to become a passage, I think I understand everything and nothing all at once and it is broken, it is holy, it is poured out, it is God.

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