

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

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Date: June 28, 2020, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. Video recording during COVID-19

Text: Matthew 10:40-42

Title: Extending a Cup of Cold Water

Focus: Our hospitality or welcome of vulnerable ones is not trivial or inconsequential; to extend welcome to others is like welcoming Jesus himself.

## Matthew 10:40-42

<sup>40</sup> "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup>Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; <sup>42</sup>and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

## Jesus Commissions The Twelve

Today we continue in chapter 10 in the gospel of Matthew. In this very brief reading designated by the Lectionary, just 3 verses long, we are in the same context or setting as we have been for the readings from the last two Sundays:

- Jesus is speaking with just the 12 disciples.
- In our reading from two weeks ago, which bridged chapters 9 and 10, Matthew as narrator describes Jesus as<sup>9:35</sup> "[going] about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them. . ."
- Jesus sets an example of ministry for them and then he commissions or authorizes the disciples to minister in the same way he had.
  - That Sunday, June 14, we talked about that overlooked verb (past tense) **saw or** (Present tense) **see or seeing** and how we're prone to overlook people—we often don't see them. We assume our own experience is a universal experience and we discount or deny the experience of others.
  - In that part of the passage, Jesus also gives the 12 disciples some instruction about what they are to take with them and what they are to leave behind.
    - Briefly put, he would have them to travel lightly because they are intentionally to depend on the hospitality of those who would receive them. (We'll say more about hospitality later.)

- Last week’s reading extended farther into chapter 10.
  - Jesus wanted to give the disciples a “heads up” about what they might encounter in how people would receive them. He didn’t want them to be caught off guard.
  - He wanted them to know to expect opposition or hostility.
  - If people became upset and spoke badly about Jesus, then disciples should expect people to talk badly about them as well.
  - Jesus also reassured and instructed them, “Do not be afraid.” He was saying
    - “Don’t let any fear prevent you from carrying out the mission to which I have sent you—that same mission of teaching, proclaiming the Good News, and seeking healing. That mission of seeing and having compassion.”

I’m recounting the key movements of the story from the last two weeks because our reading today is, like last week, not a new story, but the continuation of the same story.

- Jesus is talking with the 12.
- He has set an example for them of his own ministry.
- He commissions them and prepares them for their own ministry in his name.
- He tells them a bit about what to expect and
- He gives them some specific instructions.

This week’s reading is brief—just 3 verses—and with so few verses, it’s especially important that we recognize the context that establishes the framework for this portion of the story. One of the specific instructions Jesus has given that we should recall as we seek to understand the significance of today’s reading is this portion from earlier in chapter 10 about what things the disciples should take with them (or conversely, leave behind). Though Jesus is explicitly talking about what they’re to carry, what he’s really talking about is *hospitality*, the welcome that we extend to others and which we can expect from others. Here’s what Jesus said earlier in chapter 10:

**Matthew 10:** <sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: <sup>7</sup>. . . As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near’. . . <sup>9</sup>Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup>no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. <sup>11</sup>Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. <sup>12</sup>As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup>If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup>If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.

- Jesus instructed them not to take with them money or extra clothing, but to depend solely on the hospitality of others for shelter and sustenance.

## Hospitality Culture in the First Century

Jewish law held that the one who comes as a messenger for someone is legally standing in for the person who sent him or her. For all intents and purposes the messenger *is* the person who did the sending of the messenger.

Within this culture, to extend or receive hospitality was not an individual act, but it was reflective of the one who sent you

**Last week's sermon was called "So Be Not Afraid."** The focus of that sermon, to express it in one sentence, was that disciples of Jesus should expect opposition and should not be dissuaded from their mission of seeking healing. To be even more specific about the contemporary cultural setting to which I applied this, we should not let fear prevent us from standing up for justice. Jesus told the 12 to expect opposition. Some people are going to be uncomfortable. Some people are going to be upset.

As we continue to reflect on the overall passage with this week's portion, Jesus is clear that he doesn't define this mission as trivial or optional. In this week's reading he directs our attention to the ministry of hospitality as he says,

- ". . . whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42).
  - "Little ones," *mikros* in Greek, is used 6 times in the gospels, 4 of which are in Matthew, with parallels from a part of Matthew appearing once each in Mark and Luke.
  - The term can refer to children, but the way that Matthew uses it refers to those who are younger in faith or those who are particularly vulnerable.
  - The use of *mikros*, little ones, that is common to Matthew, Mark and Luke is a warning not to mislead or take advantage of "little ones." In each of those instances, Jesus says,
    - "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matthew 18:6. See also Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2).

Jesus is saying. . .

- Whoever gives these little ones a cup of cool water in my name is giving a cup of cool water to me. Whoever welcomes them welcomes me and the one who sent me.

We talked earlier about how these few verses are a part of the reading from the past two weeks, which establish the context and set the foundation of the expectation of hospitality. They also point forward to chapter 25, in which Jesus says when you have done these things to the least of these you have done them unto me.

The word (*elachistos*) for “the least of these” is the superlative for “little one,” *mikros*, that Matthew uses here. Jesus says that extending hospitality, extending a cup of cold water, extending kindness to any human being—particularly those who are vulnerable, is to welcome Jesus and thereby to welcome the Divine.

For the last two weeks, the particular contemporary context on which I’ve been focusing our attention in the sermon has been on racial justice. As I said last week with the image of “preaching with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other,” racial justice is a completely fitting and timely subject which demands we not ignore it out of fear. With Jesus’ words this week on extending a cup of cold water to “little ones,” those who are vulnerable, he once again reminds us that doing so is not trivial, inconsequential, or optional, but at the very heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

By God’s grace, may we respond with courage to this call to offer hospitality in Jesus’ name.