

A Cup of Cold Water @

Matthew 10:40-42 (The Message) June 29, 2014

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⁴⁰ “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person, as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.

⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Today is a simple message. Jesus’ message here ends a discourse with his disciples that was anything but simple. We read all that last week in the text before this one.

Jesus was sending his followers out to unknown places, telling them to take nothing with them, to count on the hospitality of strangers, and he assured them that they would not always receive it.

Jesus tells them they are going out like sheep among wolves. There will be times when people hate them, say lies about them, persecute them – just as they had Jesus.

And one of the hardest things to accept is that Jesus tells them, because of him, there will be division – even hatred between family members. We know that over the long years since Jesus lived and died, there has been much division between people who have believed in Jesus as God’s Son – as the Messiah – and those who do not believe. And that does include some family. Families divided.

How sad it is. But it is even more sad to see believers – Jesus’ followers – not able to be in unity together. So often the Church is divided too.

As tough and as true as that is, though, today I want to point to Jesus’ last words in this discourse – words about welcoming, about hospitality, about giving simple things to one another in the name of the one we believe in – Jesus, our Savior.

This is not the only place in Matthew where Jesus talks about giving and doing for someone else. “If you’ve done it to the least of these,” Jesus says in Matthew 25, “You’ve done it also to me.” If you’ve visited the sick, those in prison; if you’ve fed the hungry, clothed those who are cold, if you’ve given shelter, welcomed the homeless, you’ve done it to me.

And today, in this little paragraph, Jesus says if you offer even a cup of cold water – you will receive your reward. What reward? A heavenly reward ... a life of communion with the one we serve – because if you give a cup of cold water – a simple thing – to a person who is thirsty, you have done it for Jesus. It’s as if you have given it to Jesus.

I’ve been thinking a lot this week about where I see us at Holly Presbyterian Church giving a cup of cold water.

I think, possibly, you often don’t realize how much you do. I see it as you care for one another. Giving a hug. Sending a card. Smiling. Listening. Offering a prayer. Taking food to someone when needed. Being a loving friend.

The simple things ... that seem so easy and natural for us, things we do without thinking about it ... often turn out to be the most meaningful things – and I do not think they go unnoticed by our Heavenly Father. In fact, this is what Jesus is saying to his disciples – then and now.

What are some other ways that this church family reaches out to “the least of these” ... to “give a cup of cold water?”

The Baby Pantry is one example. Many of us cannot imagine the gratitude and relief that the baby pantry offers to so many young mothers and fathers who are working 2 or 3 jobs, but cannot make ends meet. They love their children and they are trying to do their best. We don’t judge, we just offer help.

Our discretionary money is small, but it too, really makes a difference for the people we are able to help. Added to help from other organizations, we are able to offer a way for people to get back on their feet.

What are some other things you can think of?

- Funeral dinners
- Alcoholics Anonymous/AI Anon
- Special offering like One Great Hour of Sharing and The Joy Offering
- Easter Baskets at Grace Centers of Hope

And most recently we have opened our doors and welcomed and provided a space for some of our mentally challenged friends and seniors to have a place to come and socialize.

These friends are so grateful. I can’t tell you how often they say thank you and how hard they are working to try to find a way to cover what expense might be added to us for utilities. It is a simple way of offering that cup of cold water to some of those precious people Jesus speaks of so often.

And isn't all that what the Church in mission is all about? What the Church is created for – to be as Jesus is?

I've been in Flint quite a bit lately and on one of the intersections where I turn there are almost always some homeless people standing there with signs saying they are hungry and homeless.

I haven't been in the closest lane or stopped at the right time to be able to give them anything. Plus, it's kind of rare for me to have cash with me, but I'm thinking I need to have some cash handy in the car, just for that purpose.

It's so easy to become skeptical of people, which in turn makes it easy to ignore them.

I admit I've been scammed more times than I want to say, and it doesn't feel good, and it has caused me, at times, to be more hesitant about giving to people whom I know nothing about.

But it's funny how, every time I pray about the Holy Spirit giving me sight to see those He wants me to help, to be kind to – it never fails – someone comes along. And it seems to be a test because it often isn't the most convenient time.

But I have a feeling, even if the person I'm giving help to isn't on the up and up, if they aren't telling me the truth, that what matters most is what is in my heart – not whether or not I was taken for a fool. Paul does say we should be "fools for Christ."

I pray that God will keep our hearts softened and will keep our eyes open to all the people God places in our path – that we might be eager to lovingly offer even a cup of cold water.

The truth is, the cup of cold water is a metaphor for the many ways we can show compassion, kindness, and love; show acts of mercy; ways of making peace and finding reconciliation; of helping another and of offering hope where there has been no hope. It is showing hospitality ... sometimes radical hospitality to others.

And isn't it true that God has shown each of us amazing, radical hospitality, such loving kindness, as God has loved us so much he sent His Son to teach us, to show us God's love ... even to die on a cruel cross so that we might have forgiveness, mercy and be welcomed into our eternal home.

Thanks be to God for giving us so much and for showing us the way of discipleship.
Amen.