

September 4, 2016

A CUP OF COLD WATER

Matthew 10:40-42

There are two relevant issues to investigate today, based on today's reading: Hospitality, and, its Rewards.

Hospitality. Receiving someone. Welcoming them. How good are you at meeting new people? How do you feel when a stranger approaches you, comes into your presence? I was a stranger, and you welcomed me! Two years ago, I was new in Wilmington. Sometimes, people are curious enough to want to check out the new person. Others couldn't care less. They join Roger Daltrey and The Who in their song, *Won't Get Fooled Again*, saying, "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss." To some, the new person is just a substitute, a replacement, nothing really new. On the other hand, as a stranger, some don't want to get to know you, until they realize who you are. "Oh! You're the new Pastor... Welcome!" Meanwhile, in Hebrews 13:2, we are told: "*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some people have entertained angels without know it!*"

"Whoever receives you receives me..." (Matthew 10:401)

One Pastor tells the story of arriving at the Church about ten minutes before his first Sunday in his new congregation. He looked perfectly normal. He came in through the main doors as if he was a first-time visitor, and the person handing out the bulletins looked at him with an expression that not only seemed to say, "I don't know you;" but, "What are *you* doing here?" The Pastor acted in a friendly manner, but, without a word, was simply handed a bulletin and he was allowed to walk into the Sanctuary to sit down. Other people, when they arrived, were treated very kindly, and there were plenty of conversations happening in the pews around the Church, but no one engaged him. An older couple came in and sat nearby. He smiled, held out his hand and said hello. They shook it. Then he was immediately asked if he knew the Mortons, who apparently sat where he was sitting. He didn't, and that was the end of the conversation! The Mortons, when they arrived, saw a stranger in their usual place, and then sat somewhere else... even though there was room just in front of him.

At the end of the Prelude, the Pastor stepped out of the pew, walked up to the Chancel in the front of the Sanctuary, put on his clerical robe, and began the worship service joyfully, with the word, *Welcome!* Interesting story. Personally, I would never intentionally put people on the spot like that. The point, however, is that we need to welcome the stranger. "*Inasmuch as we do so to the least of these, who are brothers or sisters of Christ, we do it unto Him!*" (Matthew 25:40) "*Whoever receives you receives Me!*" Our love is to be genuine... And we are told by Paul to "*Practice hospitality!*" (Romans 12:9, 13)

Now, let's talk about **rewards**. First of all, being hospitable is its own reward. If we are nice to a stranger, they will usually be nice to us. You can't help but feel good for having opened a door for someone and let them in. We need to see every stranger as a gift sent by God. Our loving posture should be such that any stranger is just a friend we haven't met yet. And of course: We love others, not because of who they are, but, because of who we are!

Secondly: "*Whoever receives Me, receives the One who sent Me!*" (Matthew 10:40b) In verse 33, Jesus had said, "*Whoever rejects Me before others, I will reject before My Father in Heaven.*" Our reward in accepting, or, acknowledging, or, welcoming the stranger, Christ, is that we will be acknowledged before God! (10:32) When we welcome prophets and other religious people, we receive rewards as well.

“Anyone who welcomes a prophet because they are a prophet, will receive a prophet’s reward!” What could a prophet's reward be? Well, if a prophet’s purpose is to warn people, the reward is to see people take heed, and change their courses. In a way, a sense of vision is the prophet’s reward. *“Anyone who receives a righteous person because they are a righteous person, will receive a righteous person’s reward!”* In Matthew 25, those who are acknowledged as having done unto the least, and therefore, unto Christ, are called *“The righteous!”* (v. 32) Their reward is: *“Come, you who are blessed by My Father; receive your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world!”* (Matthew 25:34) The same reward is given to those who give the thirsty a drink!

Finally, I want to share a few words about *“these little ones,”* when Jesus says, *“If anyone gives even as cup of cold water to one of these little ones because they are my disciple, I tell you the truth, they will certainly not lose their reward!”* (10:42) At the beginning of Chapter 10, Jesus called His disciples together and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal. (v.1) He sends them out and tells them that they would not be welcomed everywhere, they would be like sheep in the midst of wolves, they might experience persecution, betrayal, abuse, and divisiveness. But, in this passage, Jesus is reassuring them that there will be some who will open their doors and be glad to hear the message of His Kingdom, and, that those people would be rewarded!

That cup of cold water is the epitome of God’s grace. Cold water in the land of Palestine, before the advent of refrigeration, would have been fresh water, very recently drawn, and served very intentionally. Water doesn’t stay cool for long in the heat of the holy land. So, to give someone a cup of cold water was to give them refreshing, life-sustaining hospitality. The cup of cold water is a sign of care, of kindness, of welcome, of acceptance. To a dry throat, that cup of cold water, is renewal. Now, they can speak about the Kingdom of Heaven!

I challenge you all: Be a cup of cold water for others! ...for the world!