

A Cup of Cold Water
Don Lincoln
Matthew 10: 40-42

Last Sunday our text was the very beginning of Matthew chapter 10 – today it's the concluding verses. But between those bookends in Chapter 10, Jesus commissions the twelve disciples, empowers them to cure the sick and drive out evil spirits, sends them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God, warns them of coming persecutions, tells them whom to fear and whom to ignore, reminds them the Gospel sparks division, calls them to take up their cross, and promises them rewards for their faithfulness.¹

And then these closing verses – where Jesus speaks to the disciples about being welcomed by others when they are out sharing good news – and how when they are welcomed, it is as if Jesus Himself is being welcomed. It's a lovely word of encouragement for these twelve disciples who are being sent out on Jesus' behalf – a reminder to us even today that, generally speaking, missionaries have always been dependent upon the hospitality of those to whom they are sent.

But then in one phrase, Jesus widens His commissioning of the disciples to the scope of hospitality in which ALL His followers are called to engage. "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."

Colleague David Lose, former President of Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia (who lives in Kennett Square), writes: "**Really?** That's all it takes? Seriously, something as small as giving someone a cup of cold water is what it takes to secure one's reward? Yeah, that's it. Because perhaps this chapter isn't about what it *takes* to be a disciple, but rather is describing what it actually *means* to be a disciple."¹ And what it means, is described as a spirit of hospitality that pervades one's life – an inclination toward hospitality that overflows into even the smallest of gestures.

On this holiday weekend, when we celebrate our Nation's birth and its founding principles, I am reminded of the challenges we face in terms of hospitality.

Immigration, racism, the vetting of refugees, anti-Semitism, travel bans – we struggle as a nation to be hospitable both inside and outside our borders – as hospitable as the words engraved on our Statue of Liberty – "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free; the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

But let's be clear – our nation's hopes and fears, in terms of heroic and systemic gestures of hospitality, reflect the same challenges evident in the church as it has struggled over the centuries to be welcoming. And indeed, both the church and nation are simply reflections of our individual, personal struggles, hopes, and fears when it comes to hospitality.

Being willing to give a cup of cold water to the least of these is a look – on a microscopic scale – at the challenges we face on the macro level of being hospitable. The fact is, there are some of us in here who remember separate drinking fountains. And suddenly, a cup of cold water isn't quite so insignificant. And I would hazard a guess that in Flint, Michigan, this text has taken on a whole new meaning.

Colleague Pam Driesell, pastor in Atlanta, whose sister and family attend our 11:10 service, writes this: The term "little ones" in this text refers not only to children, but to those considered inferior and vulnerable. Little ones foreshadows the reference to "the least of these" in Matthew 25, the vulnerable who are, indeed, Christ in need. And the ones who give food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit prisoners – show hospitality – are the ones who will know blessings, who will have both encountered Christ and embodied Christ. For you and I are called to both represent Christ **TO** the stranger and to see and encounter Christ **IN** the stranger."²

This is the heart of this text. The passage reminds you and me of our human capacity to be Christ to one another – friend and stranger alike. And while you and I are called to heroic acts of hospitality and welcome – working to impact and effect the systems of nations and denominations and congregations – those grand and heroic gestures of hospitality must undoubtedly find their roots in – be grown in – the soil of our – yours and mine - daily living, and being and seeing Christ in the world in everyone.

Such that when somebody cuts you off in a merging lane on a local highway you'd be generous and let them go instead of reacting with violence. Such that when we hear of a 15-year-old who has been rescued from human trafficking, who has a one-year-old child and needs some assistance, we would take the opportunity to respond.

Mother Theresa reminds us that every day we encounter Christ in "distressing disguise in those hungry not only for bread, but hungry for love; naked not only for clothing, but naked of human dignity and respect; homeless not only for want of a room of bricks, but homeless because of rejection," with no place to belong.

You and I are called to offer a cup of cold water – in whatever form that needs to take place – to the least of these – the little ones. Why? Because we know ourselves what it means to be the least – and to be welcomed. How? It is here at this Table.

(From in front of the communion table).

200 years ago one of my colleagues or I, or one of the elders of this congregation, would have come to your house in the last few days to have a conversation with you. We would have interviewed to find out if you were worthy to come to communion. In other words, we would be guarding this Table, protecting it, putting a fence around it, or putting a wall between you and it. And only if we considered you faithful enough, would we have given you a token that you would present when you came forward today to receive the elements.

I'm so glad I was not a pastor 200 years ago!!! And I bet YOU'RE glad too!!! 😊

This Table is not fenced. And the good news is that no matter how profane any one of us in here might be, God's hospitality is big enough for every one of us. We are all welcomed. There are no walls, no fences, no barriers, no borders here. If you feel you don't deserve it, listen to this: that's when you most deserve to come.

Let us come and sup with this hospitable One.

AMEN.

1. David Lose, *In the Meantime*, blog on the text.
2. Pam Driesell, *Feasting on the Gospels*, Matthew 10: 40-42.