

Lectionary 13 A 2020

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

June 28, 2020

Matthew 10:40-42; Jeremiah 20:7-13

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Our congregation does at least three things to help feed the hungry. We support Interfaith Community Services on at least three levels. ICS does a variety of things, including operating a very large and excellent food pantry. In at least three different ways, our congregation contributes to that operation. You may have participated in our drive-by food pantry dropoff at Saint Odilia's Roman Catholic parish on May third. That was for ICS.

The second thing our congregation does to feed the hungry is the Primavera Foundation men's shelter. Where we provide a hot supper that we prepare, usually anchored by meat loaf. Serving that hot meal to those homeless men in the shelter where they sleep is a very humbling and powerful experience. That program is halted due to the coronavirus, but we always need more volunteers to cook and to serve. So maybe you'd like to get involved in that in the future. But our pledged monthly support to the shelter continues despite the pandemic.

The third thing our congregation does to feed the hungry is to provide a small grocery bag of edible items to the local homeless people who come to the doors of our church. These food items in these bags cannot require a stove or an oven or a can opener. They have to be food that someone who lives outdoors without a kitchen can eat. Homeless people don't have kitchens. A lot of them camp in the Pima Wash about a thousand feet from our church. So we give them a small bag of food with things like peanut butter and crackers. They ring the bell, and we bring it out to them. And I insist that they be offered a bottle of cold water. We have four refrigerators at Dove of Peace. And it's 108 degrees outside in June. We can give them a chilled water bottle. And when I insist on that, I'm thinking of today's gospel, Matthew chapter ten verse 42: *"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."* All of this work, all of this social ministry, continues. Even though we do not have public worship services. Even though we are experiencing pandemic. People continue to support our congregation with their resources. So that the mission continues. Even though we don't have a lot of gatherings, we are still the church. In mission together.

"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 wasn't talking about the homeless in that verse. Although he almost certainly was doing so later in Matthew, when he said *I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I*

was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. [Matthew 25:35f] The words in today's gospel come at the conclusion of a section where Jesus is sending his followers out in mission and service and has told them that they will not always be welcomed. They will face hostility and persecution and deceit. These were our gospel readings over the previous couple of Sundays:

- *"I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves."* [10:16a]
- *"You will be hated by all because of my name."* [10:22a]
- *"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."* [10:39]
- *"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."* [10:14]

So Jesus is not promising comfort and ease to his followers. He's assuring them of rejection and conflict.

But. Some people *will* receive his followers. Some people will welcome them. So there is a blessing on *those* people. There is a promised reward for those people. So this is not about the twelve. The twelve disciples named at the beginning of this chapter of Matthew. Peter, Andrew, James, John, et cetera. This is about people whom the twelve can rely upon on the way. This is about people who welcome, assist, support the followers of Jesus. With as little as a cup of cold water.

When Jesus gives instructions to the twelve, it's not always easy to know if those instructions apply to us. They are followers of Jesus, we are followers of Jesus. They are disciples, we are disciples. In a sermon two weeks ago, I took the words that he gave to the twelve: *"Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"* and I interpreted it as guidance for all of us in our own time, in our own place. But other things that Jesus says in that same section surely do not apply to us now, in Arizona. For example, Jesus said to them, *'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'* [10:5b-6] That surely does not apply to us. But to those specific twelve Jewish men in that specific context.

Not everyone is a spiritual champion. Not everyone is a Peter or Paul. What Jesus is talking about today is the ones who can *receive* a Peter or a Paul. In the actual history, all of these people were wandering travelers. They needed support— like a roof, like food, like a bed. Villagers who accommodated these wandering preachers were making the mission possible. You have the spiritual champions, but the mission requires others. Not all of us are superstars. But we can receive those who are doing the Lord's work. We can give them a cup of cold water. And we will not lose the reward.

A congregation like Dove of Peace relies upon a lot of small kindnesses. Not everyone is a preacher. Or as Paul would say, not everyone is an apostle or a miracle-worker. But the whole body is necessary. So in a congregation like ours, or in the whole Christian church worldwide,

it's millions of small kindnesses, tiny excellences, modest contributions, small scale sweetness, cups of cold water that make the whole enterprise go.

Today's gospel uses the expression "in the name of." In the name of a prophet, in the name of a righteous person, in the name of a disciple. That's an idiomatic expression that means due to the office of that person. In other words, receive a prophet because he is a prophet. Receive a righteous person because she is a righteous person. Welcome the disciples because they are disciples. This means supporting and affirming the Christian purpose of someone because it is a Christian purpose.

This doesn't mean being blind to our differences. In the Church we have black people and white people, men and women, gay and straight, Republican and Democrat, people who like cilantro, people who hate cilantro. It's not that those things don't matter. But we have to be deliberate about receiving the disciple because they are a disciple. We must welcome the righteous person because she is a righteous person. We must hear the prophet because they are a prophet. The gospel today was intentionally paired with a reading from Jeremiah. Jeremiah is quintessentially the prophet of the Old Testament who was ignored, rejected, unheeded. That's why his words are paired today with the words of Jesus. Because we have to go beyond what we don't like or don't understand and listen to what God is saying to us through another person. We have to go beyond what is similar to us or different from us, and see the purpose that God has placed upon that other individual.

And sometimes, give them a cup of cold water.

Amen.