

Matthew 10:40-42

June 28, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Ok – so today, we continue with Jesus giving the disciples some advice before they are sent out to proclaim God’s favor to all of the Jewish people in the land.

Now, you can probably imagine, that being occupied people, they may not have wanted to listen to the disciples’ good news. All of the evidence surrounding them would suggest that God did not love them. If anything, everyone would assume that God was against them, not for them.

But, that’s exactly why Jesus came. He came to let the oppressed know that God is listening to them. That God is with them. That God is on their side.

For too long, the Temple had implied that things were God’s blessings. Rich people were blessed and poor people were not. If God really loved you, you would have a lot of stuff. That’s what we call glory theology today, which is super popular on TV, and people eat it up. I don’t know why. Perhaps it’s just another symptom of our consumer mentality.

But, if we look at the Bible, the entire collection, all 66 books of the Bible, that claim is strongly disputed. Just look at Ecclesiastes. Solomon called it vanity of vanities. It’s like the wind. Stuff isn’t where it’s at. True blessings are relationships, especially our relationship with God. And that’s the real reason Solomon was wise. He recognized that the most important thing is to be connected to God.

So, when Jesus sends out the disciples to proclaim that God is with them, he sends them out empty handed, because it’s not about stuff. It’s about relationships. God is relationship. The Holy Trinity is relationship, and we are invited into that relationship. That is the good news! And Jesus brings us in to that relationship. That’s God’s gift to us – each and every one of us.

So, the disciples are sent out and Jesus tells them that welcome is their true reward for all of their hard work. Welcome. Relationships. Welcome is the reward.

Have you ever been welcomed somewhere? Have you ever truly welcomed someone into your life? No matter which side of the welcome you are on, it is an amazing gift.

I’m a shy person. When I walk into a room full of people I don’t know, I get really uncomfortable, unless I’m there on official business. But, when I’m there just as Alena, I want to just go crawl into a hole. It’s even that way with a group of acquaintances.

My last high school reunion was super uncomfortable for me. My friend Inka and I decided to go to the Friday night mixer and the Saturday dinner. I was hoping to see some of my friends there, but aside from Inka, it was just acquaintances.

Later on a few friends did show up, but I still felt super self-conscious, especially since some of the people there knew I was a pastor. You get into all sorts of weird conversations with people when they know you're a pastor – ranging from judgement to guilt, or they just want to try and shock you.

When my friend John showed up, I felt so much better, because John is the most welcoming person I know. He has this gift of bringing people together from all different circles. He practiced the gift of welcome, and then passed it on to others.

Welcoming he was welcomed, and then the ones he welcomed became welcoming. It's all relational.

Welcome is its own reward. By the end of the first night's gathering, everyone was laughing and taking pictures together. It just took one person to start tearing down the walls that divide.

So, Jesus sent out the 12, because each of them had their own gifts and passions, which meant that each of them could break down walls in different circumstances.

Just like I can't go into a shooting range and start talking about guns, most of you can't go into the zoo and talk about all of the animals. We've all been gifted with different interests and abilities so that we can reach different people. It takes all of us to be the body of Christ. The body who tears down all the walls that divide.

Tomorrow we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Lutheran Church.

Fifty years ago the word "man" got changed to "person" in the part of the constitution pertaining ordination. By the end of 1970, two women were ordained as pastors, but the Church was not very easy on them. They were rejected a lot and got regulated to teaching positions where they were allowed to work with young people, but not adults.

They were lifted up while at the same time being sequestered. But, they persevered and today more women are coming out of seminary than men, not to mention all of the LGBTQIA+ Christians who are also getting ordained.

Women pastors were definitely third class citizens in the 70s. A lot has changed in 50 years, but somethings still haven't changed. Women are still considered to be lesser pastors by a lot of people, surprisingly by a lot of fellow women.

But, with a wide range of pastors, the net of God's love is bigger than ever, and the walls that once separated people are coming down. The more diverse our leaders are, the more welcome there is in the world.

But, the gift of welcome isn't just regulated to pastors and deacons. The gift of welcome is for all Christians – to practice, and accept. We are to welcome others and we are to accept the welcome of others as well. It's not just a one way street of giving. Gifts have to be accepted for relationships to grow.

Diverse pastors can be as welcoming as Jesus, but there will be no difference in the world unless their testimony is also welcomed.

Have you ever offered someone a gift and they rejected it? It's heart breaking. It's heartbreaking, b/c it hurts the relationship. Giving and receiving are so important.

While I was in Guyana, I asked the missionary there if I could buy some of the women's curry powder so that those of us who went on the accompaniment trip could share it with our congregation. I told him I would pay for it.

He went on to tell me that it would be an offense for me to pay for it. The women want to give it as a gift – a gift of welcome to me and the congregation who sent me. It's relational. And that is so important in the spreading of the Gospel. The last thing people in the developing world need is another American white savior.

We are all equal in God's love. No one can lord it over another. That's a hard lesson for those of us from a wealthy industrialized country to acknowledge. We think we just have to give, but we forget how important it is to accept the gifts of others as well. Welcoming a gift from someone else validates them, and it validates us too.

Giving and receiving without a ledger is one of the most important thing we can do, because when we do that, we become a community - a family – a family who only cares about the well-being and happiness of the other.

“Does this bring you joy? Then take it! Because your joy brings me joy, and in that joy, we are one – one with each other and one with God, because that's how we live into the Gospel.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are a gift that we can only receive with joy and then share with others.

In the weeknight Bible studies, we have been going through the Episcopal Church's Way of Love, which could really be called the way of joy.

To have a healthy relationship with God, we need 7 things in our lives – to turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, and rest. We need all of those things every day to be connected to God and thereby one another.

When it comes to blessing, we often think of it being the things we receive. But, in The Way of Love, blessing is also what we do for others. When we look at what we have and see how it can bring joy to someone else and then give it, we know blessing. We live blessing. There is joy in both giving and receiving.

Right now the world is very complex. There is a lot going on. Most of the time we may have no idea what to do. But, Jesus gives us great advice. If you don't know what to do, just give someone something to drink. Give them a glass of water. You'd be amazed how that small act causes walls to crumble down.

Are there any Big Bang Theory or Young Sheldon fans out there? Whenever someone is upset around Sheldon, he goes and prepares them a hot beverage. It gives him something to do and it is an act of love for someone else. With that hot beverage, he bonds with the person who is hurting, and they bond with him.

So, Jesus sends us out to share a beverage with others. On hot summer days, a nice cold drink of water is always welcome. I encourage you to carry bottles of water with you in a cooler in your car so that anytime you come across someone who is begging on the street corner or just looks parched, you can share a cup of water with them.

You might be surprised what a blessing that is – for you and for them. Because, when you share a bottle of water, God, the creator, is looking through your eyes and Jesus, the crucified, is looking through theirs as the Holy Spirit works in your midst.

Sharing what we have with others and accepting the gifts others have to offer is a simple act of welcome, and welcome is its own reward, because through it we live the Gospel. We receive and we give.

Thanks be to God. Amen.