



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

When I was very young, I loved to play with toys just like most other kids. I remember having a Lincoln Log set. Remember those? This was a time before Lego's gained popularity. Gosh, I am getting old. Anyway, there were days when I made a mess in the living room. Mom wanted everything picked up before dad got home from work. Often, I would get frustrated as it seemed like a lot to clean up especially since my little sister could not really help. It was then that mom taught me a life-long trick.

She told me to start with just one little thing at a time and do that first. Then go on to another group and work on it. Somehow it seemed like not such a huge task if it was taken in smaller pieces. Bet you wondered where I got my organization skills from? Thanks Mom!

Well, Jesus in our Gospel reading for today, tells us some of His secrets as to what we should do as a disciple. We know that we can never accomplish such a huge job as Jesus did. How could we ever be like someone so great, someone who is God? But Jesus does share an important lesson, sort of like the one my mother taught me. He tells us about how important it can be to do even things that seem very small, like giving a cup of cold water. If we can do that maybe, just maybe, we will be able to do some other small things. And small things can often times have big results.

In order to fully understand our brief three verse Gospel lesson, I think we need to remember the context. In this chapter of Matthew, Jesus gets his 12 disciples together and gives them the power to heal the sick and drive out demonic spirits from people. Then they get their marching orders. Jesus is realistic and tells the disciples that they will face persecution and criticism, yet tells them not to be afraid. He reminds them that God loves them and promises to acknowledge them to His Father in heaven. This sort of reward does have risks, even as people receive the blessings that the disciples bring. If someone welcomes these disciples, they too are at risk as their actions demonstrate a personal support for Jesus and his church. The Romans as well as Satan will not be happy with this

attitude of the people. I think, such action creates a four-way partnership between God, Jesus, disciple, and recipient.

God began this partnership by sending his only Son Jesus to earth to walk among us. Jesus then sends out the disciples to share the Good News of the Gospel. The disciples actually go out to do as commanded. And those who welcome the disciples of Jesus support them not only with food, shelter, and clothing, but also with their belief in the one true Messiah, Jesus.

Receiving the disciples is just like bringing Jesus into your home, into your heart. Much like our ambassadors of today, that represent the United States in many different countries. They bring all the US stands for to corners of the world. Disciples as well as the prophets, who are welcomed in the name of Jesus will bring reward to those who welcome them. Today we have our own prophets. We, as disciples of Jesus, are also to be welcomed and bring with us the reward of coming to know Christ Jesus as the Savior of the world. And that in itself brings huge rewards of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. It is such belief that will bring righteousness to all who allow Jesus into their hearts.

The last verse of our 3 verse lesson talks about giving a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple. I don't think that Jesus is just speaking about children but rather the infirmed, the hungry, the naked and those in prison. And folks, this is the call that we are tasked too here. To help those less fortunate than ourselves. And it does not have to be a big thing. It can be as simple as giving a cup of cold water to someone who thirsts, of providing a meal to the hungry, of opening a door for someone who cannot do it for themselves, or even giving a smile. These small gifts are things anyone of God's children can provide. Just remember where there is a need, we can answer, even if it seems small to us, it can be lifesaving. God rewards even the smallest contribution to those in His Kingdom. There is no explanation as to what the reward will be, but we are assured there will be one.

However, giving a small gift to someone should not be done with the idea that we will receive something in return. Gift giving is to be done from the heart, even if it might have a cost to the giver.

Today, there are different kinds of costs that we the given might experience. The first one would be financial. If you have been to Super One lately, you know that buying the groceries to feed a family even one meal might be a bit daunting. Combined with other people's resources it can be more manageable.

A second cost might be personal. Inviting someone into your home can be stressful. Most of our homes have just enough room for our own families. Welcoming others might mean setting up extra beds in the living room and taking turns in the shower. Those of us who are set in our ways might have trouble with such change or the mess of a load of towels.

Lastly, there is the fact that danger is a possible cost. Who knows if the refugees you welcome might be mass murders or not? I have been a Watkins dealer for decades and I remember the history of the company where the Watkins man would come around to homes over a hundred years ago to sell his liniment, Petro-carbo salve, and vanilla. Then

during war years, the company had to enlist women to take over that role and it was not easy as women were afraid to knock on doors. You never know what is behind the door. Remember Richard Dahmer? Or how about the young man who went to the wrong address to get his siblings and was shot through the door? Personal safety today is an issue probably more than in Jesus' day. Could be a reason we live in Park Falls???

Even with all these costs of discipleship, the benefits far out way them. First, Jesus is quite clear that even though we have not seen Him in person, we can be assured that we will reap rewards. Those who receive him while walking this earth's pathways will certainly be rewarded for their service to him, just like every disciple and prophet would. Secondly, Jesus tells us that those of us who are of little means will not be penalized for their modest gifts. Even that cup of cold water, a simple gift of hospitality is just as great as a rich man providing a banquet for a hall full of hungry persons. Thirdly, we also reap a reward as the person who welcomes a prophet or disciple into their home. God looks on that hospitality as important. He knows every generous action on behalf of the faithful. They are all counted as gifts to Jesus.

And lastly, those of us who are engaged in the Lord's work are assured that those who help us are promised a reward. That is true whether the servants of the Lord are clergy or lay persons, preacher, or janitor. Both are engaging in the ministry of Jesus. And that is the important message of this Gospel text.

Be encouraged in your faith and your witness. God is with you and Christ is promising you a great reward for your faithfulness. Support others in their ministry. Encourage them in their service, welcome them and receive them as from Christ Himself. Pray for them instead of criticizing them. Find the best in what they say or do. And don't listen to those nay sayers who do not believe in the rich rewards that come to us in the Kingdom of God.

And now in closing a cute quick story:

The story is told of an old man whose grandson rode a donkey while they were traveling from one city to another. The man heard some people say, "Would you look at that old man suffering on his feet while that strong young boy is totally capable of walking?"

So, then the old man rode the donkey while the boy walked. And he heard some people say, "Would you look at that, a healthy man making the poor young boy suffer. Can you believe it?"

So, the man and the boy both rode the donkey, and they heard some people say, "Would you look at those heavy brutes making the poor donkey suffer."

So, they both got off and walked, until they heard some people say, "Would you look at the waste—a perfectly good donkey not being used."

In the final scene, the boy is walking, and the old man is carrying the donkey.

The moral of the story: No matter what you do, someone can always criticize it. But if you trust and follow Jesus, you can never go wrong. AMEN