

Proper 8A
Matthew 10: 40-42
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July 2, 2017

Relationship

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones . . . will not lose their reward.

These words complete the tenth chapter in Matthew, a chapter telling us of the trials of following the Messiah. Jesus has empowered his disciples to carry his message of good news into the world, yet warned that discipleship can cause fractures in relationships, even close ones within families and communities. Jesus also promised that God knows us and loves us, even to the number of hairs upon our heads. And although life will not be without trials, we are reminded to not be afraid, for God is with us. We are not alone.

We can trust that we won't be alone, as we share the good news of God's love and compassion by welcoming all, by offering hospitality, and caring for one another. For even the small, mundane, daily acts of kindness towards one another, like offering a cool drink of water in Christ's name, do matter.

Last week, as a congregation we joined together to commission the Honduras Mission team in preparation for their work with the children's home at LAMB Institute. I scheduled that dedication a week earlier than usual, knowing that many of our team members would be out of town this holiday weekend. But today actually begins that final countdown for our Holy Spirit team — it's 6 nights and a wake up, until we meet here, bright and early next Saturday, to carpool to the airport and head to Honduras.

We're basically ready. The big arrangements are all finalized: coordination with our LAMB partners, transportation, lodging, and lists distributed of what we each need to be sure to bring. We'll have a packing party this Wednesday afternoon to fill our luggage with all the ingathered items and spend time discussing any last-minute questions or concerns. We have a general idea of what the week's schedule will look like, but not the specifics of what we'll do. Things are always rather undefined on these trips until we get there and that's part of the challenge of the experience — letting go of our need to be in charge, on time, on schedule, and efficiently completing some prescribed task, and instead slowing our pace, opening our hearts, minds, and bodies to serve, in whatever capacity may be needed. We intentionally step out of our comfort zones and normal routines and take the time to witness God's work in the world in a new way, as we strive to go out as a team and be the church.

I sometimes get asked, why do we go? Why do we head out internationally, instead of doing something similar here?

My first response is that our work of where we carry Christ's light into the world is not an either/or, but a both/and. Yes, there is work to be done here, both locally and regionally, and we can and should do that, too! And we do engage in ministries like Family Promise, the Pantry, Church of the Common Ground, and Arrendale Prison, to name a few. But for some, there is a call to go

farther afield and physically enter into another culture, exposing ourselves to differences which can teach us so much about the beauty of relationships formed through our love of Christ.

It's not's important whether we go out into the world here or there, but that we go. Getting out of our "bubble" allows us to begin to build relationships with those outside of our immediate circle, helping us to broaden our perspective and our point of view. Getting to know people with life experiences and concerns different than our own expands our sense of community. We learn to see beyond stereotypes and labels and instead recognize that these others are our neighbors, are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And it becomes too painful to isolate and look away, to not care about those who we've come to know, for they are no longer faceless. Building relationships, changes everything, for God is relationship.

God is relationship.

There's an ancient Greek term, *perichoresis* used by the early church to describe the nature of the relationship of the members of the Trinity. Interestingly, this word is also the origin for our word choreography. It describes a mutual indwelling — think of it as a divine circle dance — representing the loving action of the three Persons of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy One in the form of Three, where individuality and unique identities are maintained, while each share completely in the life of the other two.

In the beginning, was The Relationship.

We are made in God's image. We are made for relationship, made to participate in the divine dance.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest recently wrote a book titled *The Divine Dance*. There's a marvelous section in it, which hit home for me. Rohr talks about the complexity of our lives, "beneath the ugly manifestations of our present evils — political corruption, ecological devastation, warring against one another, hating each other based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation — the greatest dis-ease facing humanity right now is our profound and painful sense of disconnection. Disconnection from God . . . but also from ourselves . . . , from each other, and from the world."

Really listen to that line: "Humanity's greatest *dis-ease* is disconnection from God, from ourselves, from each other, and from the world."

Rohr goes on to explain that in discovering the gift of the Trinity — the gift of deep relationship in God — we can begin to reconnect with others and the world, by opening ourselves to seeing God's divine light in everyone, especially in those who are different.

Part of pursuing and sustaining relationships with those outside our bubble is that we must learn to let go — and we really learn this in Honduras — to let go of the need to fix, to let go of the need to control the direction or pace of the relationship, and instead to simply be. Be present, be patient, be willing to listen and learn. By letting go, we can begin to participate in mutual indwelling, by allowing ourselves to be in an interdependent relationship with those who are different from us.

It is hard to try something new. It can be frightening to actively engage in coming to know those we consider “other.” It takes courage to develop relationships with those we may consciously or unconsciously stereotype and label, for it may reveal how our both our action and inaction affects those around us.

Building new relationships requires trust. Trust that we — who are empowered by the Spirit, fed by God’s word, and nourished at the table with Christ’s own Body and Blood — that we will be given the strength to carry Jesus’ message of welcome and hospitality to all, even those who society tells us that it’s okay to ignore. . . refugees, immigrants, the oppressed and marginalized, the poor.

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones . . . will not lose their reward.

We are invited by our living God into deep relationship. We are welcomed into the Divine Dance, for we are most fully human when we create connections and willingly seek out friendships and relationships across those differences that can divide us.

As Christ’s disciples, we are called to live into Christ’s love, compassion, and caring — accepting that all who God has created are beloved.

God is with us, love us, cares for us. All of us. Pass it on. Amen.