

Matthew 10:40-42

It feels good to be rewarded, doesn't it? Some rewards I can think of are a trophy for winning a tournament, a bonus for doing a good job at work, complements for taking extra time to look good or for having good taste or good judgment, and I'm sure you can think of other rewards. Jesus promises us rewards and tells us we won't lose our reward if we give a cup of water to these little ones in the name of a disciple, but notice, but notice, it's not just any cup of water, it's a cup of cold water.

One time I took a trip to Yellowstone National Park, driving the distance of close to 1800 miles to get there. We made several stops on the way including an Indian burial mound museum, the Corn Palace, The Bad Lands, Devils Tower, Mount Rushmore, to name a few. But the most anticipated, unplanned stop on our way was a retail outlet with a tantalizing marketing scheme. Wall Drugs. Every few miles there would be a sign inviting travelers to stop at Wall Drugs for a cup of cold water. That may not sound like a big deal right now, but when you are traveling in temperatures soaring above 90 degrees, with the hot sun beating down through the windshield, before the days of bottled water in a cooler at your feet, a cold glass of water was worth stopping for. Not warm, not lukewarm, not even cool, but cold. It was refreshing, and it was free (unless you got caught up in the lure of the overpriced souvenirs available to purchase!)

Remember, Jesus specified cold water. Once again, that doesn't seem like such a big deal unless you think of the culture in which this was written. Most women went to the well in the early morning to avoid the heat of the day. They filled a jug made from earthen pottery with fresh, clean, cold, good tasting well water, then carried it home on their heads. It was taken inside the home, and set in a shadowy place, and when it was first brought into the house it was still cold. A couple of hours later, it may still have been cool. But what about around supper time, the hottest time of the day? The earthen jug of water had been sitting inside the hot house for hours; do you think it was still even cool? Probably not, it was probably lukewarm at best. So having cold water was a big deal.

It meant that someone went to a lot of trouble for you. There was no running water, no refrigeration, and ice probably wasn't imagined as something to add to water. As the jug sat in the house it lost its initial coldness, its fresh taste, its refreshing nature; if someone gave you a glass of cold water, it meant someone went to a lot of trouble to run to the well and bring back cold water for you. Another thing, it was far healthier to have fresh cold water than having water that sat around in a jug, warming with the heat of the day. Who knows what germs could grow in that jug?

This section of the gospel we heard today is the closing of Jesus' instructions to his disciples as he was sending them out into the world without him by their side. He's instructed them to preach the word, heal the sick, cast out demons, and convince the people they run into that God, God's love, and God's judgement, are closer than they know.

If you've ever taken a major life journey such as going off to college, enlisting in the military or moving halfway across the country you may have had someone give you advice. It may pertain to the weather... dress warm when it's cold, wear sunscreen when you are out of doors. It could be practical advice regarding chores... something I wish I would have been told before doing my own laundry at college... don't mix colors with whites or they will turn out dingy, or in

my case bright pink. It could be the good word of advice not to give in to peer pressure, or to always wear clean underwear in case you are in an accident and end up in the emergency room.

Jesus gave different advice. Advice that was necessary to bring good news to a hurting world. Be bold when you preach and teach and heal. Don't waste your time in a village that doesn't want to hear the good news. Travel light. Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. God will give you the right words at the right time, don't worry that you won't be able to bring the message. When things get really bad, (and they will), people may even hate you. Even your own relatives may hate you. Remember, they can kill the body, but not the soul. (Not exactly encouraging.) Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. With these and similar words of wisdom, Jesus equips his disciples for their bold, risky and momentous journey. They're going to prepare those who will listen for the coming reign of God.

Then, just as you think Jesus is finished giving his disciples instructions, he adds the few lines that we heard today, the message of offering a cup of cold water to the "little ones". Who are the "little ones"? Believe it or not, the little ones are the disciples whom he is sending out. With these words Jesus is addressing the surrounding crowd, telling them that he has concern for those who are going out into the field. Jesus has just told them what a difficult task they are embarking upon, that some people will not want to hear their message, but there will be others who have open ears and open hearts. The disciples won't know what to expect until they get there, they've just got to trust God and go. But to those who are not going Jesus says he expects them to understand that if they welcome him, they are welcoming God who sent him. If you welcome a prophet, you receive a prophet's reward. If you welcome a righteous person, you receive the same reward the righteous person receives. And then he encourages them to give a cup of cold water to "these little ones". In other words, Jesus says that he will remember the kindnesses that are extended when the time of the final judgement arrives.

The disciples are sharing the good news of salvation, a gift they offer for free. Some people will reject the gift, others will accept it but let go of it as soon as they go on their way, some will offer them a drink from the jug of water that has been sitting in the shadows of the house. But, then, there will be those who offer a cold drink of water, fresh from the well.

So many gifts today depend upon deserving what has been given. Rewards like I mentioned at the start: you're given what you've earned. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. A sense of entitlement. You get a cup of water from the jar that's sat in the house all day long; that's what everyone is entitled to. We live in a society that's full of entitlement. And sometimes it carries over to the poor who we don't feel are deserving of our help. Will they really work for food or does their sign just say that? Are they going to use the money I worked hard to get to buy drugs or alcohol if I hand them a couple dollars? Why don't they just get a job? Maybe that cold drink of water isn't as easy to get today as we think.

What Jesus is teaching us today is that a faithful life includes caring for others. When we are the ones to reach out with cold glasses of water, or a sandwich, or a kind word or smile, we are the ones who are being disciples because we are the ones who are taking Jesus to a world that is in dire need of the saving grace that comes from God through the works of Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that we all have the same thirst. We all have the same basic needs. And the only person who is able to quench that thirst is the one who offers Living Water. We have received it, and believe it or not, giving it away will bring rewards. All glory be to God. Amen.