



Pastor Gwen's Message

Sunday June 28, 2020

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

Our reading for today is, I believe, the shortest one in our Lectionary; 3 verses. But in order to appreciate fully those verses, we should look at the context. In the beginning of chapter 10 in Matthew's Gospel we heard Jesus giving the disciples healing powers to cure every disease, every sickness and to cast out demons. A few verses later Jesus gives them their marching orders. He orders them to go out and share the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near. But Jesus warns them that they will not have it easy as they may face persecution. Jesus also reassures them that they have nothing to fear. And then last week's message was a warning that Jesus has come not to bring peace, but a sword. Our three verses conclude this chapter in Matthew with talk of rewards. These verses contain a promise from Jesus that loyalty to Him will have its ups and downs, pluses and minuses.

The reward is one that Jesus will grant to those who receive the disciple's message. It is not just good news for the disciples but rather explains the partnership that Jesus has created between God, Jesus, disciple and host. You see, God began this partnership by sending Jesus to earth. Then Jesus sends out the disciples. The disciples go out and those that are open to hearing the message of the disciples will provide support for the disciples. This relationship between prophets, righteous persons and little ones and the disciples seems to be similar to the principal that the way you treat an ambassador is how you treat a country.

It is worth noting here that there are three very different classes of people here. First are the prophets. They would be people who were revered as spokespersons for God. Possibly the apostles would fall in this category. Then we have righteous persons. Those people are those who obey God and today most likely would be called "good Christians". And then the next step down, little ones. That might mean children or possibly the poor and vulnerable. These would be the ordinary people, people of little means.

All three groups of people can be welcomed by others. For those who receive a prophet it might mean necessary support of food, clothing and shelter or even money but certainly accepting the message of the prophet. With those that welcome the righteous man, they may have to offer general hospitality. And then the little ones, even a cup of cold water might be welcoming.

I believe that all service ranks the same with God. We are privileged to be able to welcome and serve those who come in the name of Jesus. We need to always be hospitable and treat people, as we would like to be treated.

True it is a fact that there are costs associated with receiving prophets, the righteous and the little ones. There are costs to being welcoming and to serving. Three things we can be aware of here.

First, is that there may be a financial cost. To care for someone else's needs can put a damper in your budget. Secondly, there may be a personal cost. I assume you know those costs. Since we live in the beautiful north woods of Wisconsin people, friends and family like to come up to visit. They invade our personal space, if you will. We change the sheets in the guest room, blow up mattresses and open our sofa sleepers. We cook meals, let them use our showers and without thinking about it they take away our privacy. Yes, we love to have them visit, but we also, unless I am unusual, at some point, like to see them go home!

And lastly, there might be some danger for us. Obviously not so much with family, but in the days when we welcomed strangers, we could have our own personal safety jeopardized.

So no matter what the cost is to the hosts, there are rewards. Remember here that we are not talking about earning our way to heaven even by being the host or hostesses to prophets, the righteous, or little ones. No matter who received this trio of visitors, we are reminded that we receive them as if they were Jesus himself. And all those who receive his prophets, his righteous and his little ones, will be rewarded. The reward will not be necessarily in proportion to who they welcomed, but rather that they did welcome. God knows what generosity is in our hearts just as he is able to count the hairs on our heads. And the gifts we give out of that generosity are all counted as gifts to Jesus and therefore are gifts to God. God has ordained that receiving will become a blessing to the giver.

I think that at one time or another in our lives we have all felt that we are more blessed to give than to receive. We cherish that feeling, that reward.

Since the pandemic hit the US several weeks ago and systemic racism has again been brought to the forefront by police violence, I have been trying to make sense out of what is happening in our country. I have found myself going to Eugene Peterson's, The Message. If you are not familiar with The Message, it is a paraphrase of the Bible that was first introduced in 1993. I believe the intention of Peterson was to update the language of the Bible so it was more easily understood, even going as far as using idioms and the slang of today. Sometimes to read Scripture in another light is a good thing. So I would like to quote the Message now reading our text for today, Matthew chapter 10 the last paragraph. Also as you listen, realize that this is the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to His disciples and think about the challenges of today.

"We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God's messenger. Accepting someone's help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing."

And so this ends the longest and probably most important sermon Jesus ever gave to His followers. We are all called as apprentices, as Peterson would say. It does not matter how big your gift is that you give or receive. Start small was the command of Jesus in this reading. We

will all be able to take advantage of the truest reward our Father has to offer. Maybe thinking of this Scripture text in harvest work and apprentice terms, makes it clearer to you than prophets, righteous, and little ones. But the message is still the same. We will have our reward, or as Matthew put it, "none of these will lose their reward."

Our reward is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He died that horrible death on a cross for our sake. He was buried and then on the third day rose again to secure for us not only forgiveness of sins, but abundant and eternal life. Jesus welcomes all people to salvation, whether they are prophets, righteous or little ones or those who welcome them. All are important to God. All the faithful will be blessed to receive His reward. **AMEN**