

Welcoming
Matthew 10:40-42
Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
June 28, 2020
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Matthew 10:40-42 (NRSV)

40“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

If ever there IS a time that we are disjointed and unsettled, it feels like it’s NOW. One of my most difficult admissions is having to say, “*I don’t have all the answers*.” It is hard to have to say, with such frequency recently, as we navigate re-launching worship together or the protocol for even walking down the street as a tourist – to have to say: “*I don’t know.*”

And if **we’re** so discombooblated (I use that word a lot lately) with the unknowns and circumstances these days – Covid-19, racial tension, church tensions...and *what IS normal...not the “new” normal – just NORMAL...with ALL THAT*, I think we get a bit of what Jesus’ disciples must have been feeling as Jesus finishes his instructions to them and sends them out on their first missionary journey.

The disciples are entering a new “stage” of their lives....like when our kids started school or we get a new job.

Things ARE going to be different for these “rookie” recruits.

Today’s verses are about the MISSION that Jesus is sending them into. We’ve focused, the last few Sundays, on this instruction discourse and heard, as we recall last week’s difficult reading, what the disciples should do if they’re scorned, ridiculed or rejected.

And, the message is the same for us.

In order for the Kingdom of God to grow, we, Jesus’ disciples, need to be welcoming to the strangers we come into contact with...and then remember

Jesus' words, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me" Jesus says, "welcomes the One who sent me. (v. 40)

Bottom line, this part of Jesus' directions are a warning that not everyone would welcome the disciples or *ACCEPT* the message they brought.

However, Jesus also said those people and households that DID receive the message would ALSO receive the rewards of God.

Stop and think about THAT for a minute!

On one hand, yes, these instructions are for a specific group of people...at a particular time and place in history. BUT: As followers of Jesus – who, **yes** Jesus is still sending out - into OUR time and place, (as followers) **we** can hear Jesus saying that when people welcome us, they're welcoming HIM and God, the One who sent him.

So, how welcoming are **we**?

On the surface, especially when we're on our best "church behavior" I know that we're warm and friendly.

But, with a challenge of self-examination: How **easy IS IT** for a stranger to come in our sanctuaries; not just to worship but to talk to us about what we believe? Would they "get" that OUR HOPE is focused on the Risen Jesus, our Savior?

It's apparent, as we are flooded with not-so-great news or negative,, I'll call it "propaganda", that it's becoming more and more important that we are ready with compassion and loving responses about Jesus Christ, the Hope of the World!

'Cause the world is too full of hurt and confusion.

"Where is God," some people are asking.

In the brokenness that surrounds us, it might seem like God is absent or that God doesn't care.

But, I think, Jesus is saying, right here in one verse from Matthew' gospel, that that God **is** present in the struggles and in the joys of life.

God is coming into the good AND the bad, through us, God's people.

Dear Ones, we are people living in the “what’s next” after the resurrection of Jesus!

And, as we live in that good news...

And, as we participate with God in the mission to bring peace into the world, God **is** present, and makes God’s self known – with healing and forgiveness and compassion through OUR words and actions as we live with the Holy Spirit within us!

I pray you’re living with that glorious realization in YOUR life...because so many others need it in theirs.

So, how do our words and actions reflect the grace and love of God, made known in Jesus? How is it shown to others?

It says in Hebrews (10:24-25) *“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...encouraging one another—and all the more as [we] see the Day approaching.”*

In these unprecedented days of safe-distancing and “doing no harm” as we wear our masks out of love, not fear, it IS a bit more difficult to invite and welcome others into our homes (even into gatherings in our building), but in the ways we do meet and CAN greet folks in parking lots and grocery stores, on the trails in our public parks...IS THE is the presence of our forgiving and peace-giving God visible through us? Can others begin to encounter God in their lives because they’ve seen *something* in us?

I’ve mentioned that the season of Pentecost is a time for us to grow in faith and go further on the journey with Jesus.

I think we should clarify that the goal of growing as Jesus’ disciples is just as much about making the Kingdom of God real in our world NOW, by extending God’s gracious, life-giving presence to everyone who welcomes us, (it’s as much about that) as it is about getting into heaven when we die.

We can make the coming Kingdom of God **real in our lives** - anywhere we can be welcomed and received by other people.

Some of you receive an email from Pastor Gene that includes his weekly sermon. I get goosebumps thinking about how Gene and I are reading the same

verses of God's Word – and our sermons, like today, are from ends of the spectrum. His sermon shared a lot about HOSTING....and I DID mention being welcoming to others.

But I also want us to focus on being invited guests.

Are we making ourselves INVITE-ABLE?

...so that others want to begin their own faith-journey with Jesus because of US? The promise of Jesus is that they welcome **him** as they welcome **us**, and by welcoming him they also receive the presence of God who is the source of all life.

Are we INVITE-ABLE?

We're living in what is called a "post-Christian" culture.

People are rejecting Christianity and say they don't have a religion.

It's discouraging to think that people struggle so much with their faith life that they leave the church because the temptation of the world is increasing....and being *faith-less* is more desirable.

So, we need to work at a Hebrews verse that says we are to "*spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*"

We can encourage others, and yes, EACH other, even if times are tough.

The world's not going to trust in one who is unreliable.

They need to know, like we do, the One who is faithful.

God, OUR GOD, is the One...

...who forgives sinners,

...who shows grace to those who need it the most but deserve it the least,

...who brings the light of new life out of the darkness of death,

...who gave The Son, who washed his followers' feet and gave his all with self-sacrificing love on the cross.

Be encouraged, Dear Ones, that even though we're in some growing pains...we can encourage one another in the Lord!

Two of our granddaughters have run track in school.

We've gotten videos of them in relay races.

Their teammates and our family cheer them on as they run their laps, pushing themselves to the finish line.

I've always been fascinated as the relay runners pass the baton to the next runner. I know they've practiced passing that darned stick...over and over again...so that IN THE RACE, the passing happens smoothly...and the exhausted runner stumble out of the track and watches the next one sprint out...and then be at the finish line, cheering just as loudly as the crowds in the stands.

All that hard work has been worth it. Our team WINS.
The team effort pays off when the entire relay squad receives a medal and we **all** celebrate.

There's something of a relay race in today's reading.
Jesus is passing the baton.
He's sending out his disciples...US!...to continue his own mission of proclaiming and putting into practice the good news of the Kingdom of God.

We've heard, remember, over the last few Sundays that the disciples have been appointed and then they get the instructions from Jesus to heal the sick, drive out evil spirits, witness about Jesus and announce that the Kingdom was near. Jesus told them it was gonna be difficult and they'd experience hardship, disagreements with their families, and even risk their own lives.

Why, then, should they bother with mission?

We got our answer in the verses that Pastor Gene read for us.
Jesus sums up the whole purpose of the mission.
The people who listen to them, the ones who welcome the good news they bring, will receive a reward.

Won't be gold, silver or bronze, but a reward beyond what they can imagine!

The keyword, for me, in these verses is WELCOME. It's made up of two words – WELL and COME.

And THAT word brings to my mind the words of Jesus saying (it comes in the next chapter of Matthew), *"Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." (I will make you well.)*

COME!

You're WELL COME!

Have you ever thought about what it was that motivated **you** to first come to church?

Not that you were “drugged” as a kid – you know, “drug to church” but, encouragement from a family member?

Or a Sunday School teacher or pastor who guided you along the journey to Life in Christ?

Maybe it was a friend who told you about the choir and you love to sing...
...what was the inspiration **you** were given?

THAT person or inspiration WAS THE BATON in YOUR relay race of life that is bringing you towards the finishing line where we’re WINNERS!

And, today, as the disciples of Jesus, we’re the runners.

The track can be muddy and sometimes getting around the curves is tougher than we’d ever think it’d be, but, the baton has been passed to us and the Good News is so good that we want everyone to have a chance to hold it!

Like the first disciples, we’re called to spread the good news of God’s love for all people – no matter their color or nationality or political bent. Like I said, some of the curves are tougher than others.

And, like dedicated athletes, we’re not drug into this race, but we’re in it willingly because we know the reward at the end. And at the reward at the end of THIS PARTICULAR race is NOT earned but has been FREELY given to us.

It is a privilege AND a responsibility!

We can’t just talk about it.

We have to practice it, just like Jesus’ first disciples.

And, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,” Jesus said, “and whoever welcomes me (he says) welcomes the one who sent me.

Be INVITE-ABLE and see, who’s going to welcome you into their lives this week? How can you **be** the peace and grace-giving presence of God in our world that is struggling to find joy and hope?

Ask the Holy Spirit to enrich your faith so that, as people welcome you this week, they’ll also welcome the Jesus in you, and find peace in the presence of our loving God in you.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.