

## Discipleship in the Lectionary - 07/02/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, July 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Matthew 10:40-42**

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### Our fields need attention

The first two parts of Matthew's discourse on discipleship covered in the lectionary during the last two weeks emphasized the cost side of discipleship (vv.16-39). This week's lectionary text shifts to beyond the disciples and to the people that receive the teachings of Christ. The emphasis is now on the reward. This shift to beyond the disciples set in motion a chain of events that after nearly two thousand years and having reached across the world through time and cultures is still driving forward today - What was initiated with God the Father and given to Jesus was passed on to His disciples. Jesus' disciples passed this on to others who became second generation disciples. Second generation disciples passed it on to others and so on across the generations until eventually it was passed on to us. Laborers have been sent out into the fields every generation since Christ's first disciples. Now it is our turn to be Christ's laborers and our own fields need attention.

### Matthew 10:40-42 Commentary

The lectionary text is the closing verses of the second of five main teaching blocks, or discourses, of Jesus. This second discourse (10:1-42) focuses on the authoritative mission of the Messiah's messengers. The latter half of this discourse addresses the characteristics needed by the disciples to carry out the mission. The closing verses shift from the fate of the disciples to the people who receive their teaching.

<sup>40</sup> *"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.*

In Jewish culture, to receive a man's agent is to receive the man himself. The idea of "receiving" (as in receiving into one's house) also implies the acceptance of teaching. In this one verse, the acceptance of the disciple's teaching is also the acceptance of Christ's teaching and thus it is as though God Himself enters the house with the disciples. The acceptance of a disciple of Christ is thus seen as a test of one's relationship with God and is further explored in The Final Judgment passage (25:31-46).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.*

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<sup>1</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 193-194.

In the Old Testament, rewards were given to those who received prophets (1 Kings 17:8–24; 2 Kings 4:8–37). The prophet and the righteous man in this context represent God (see v.41). Those who accept the Christian message receive the same reward as the preachers themselves.

*<sup>42</sup> And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

In this verse the phrase "little ones" refers to those of low social status. It is one thing to be hospitable to a celebrity teacher (an example is when Simon the Pharisee hosted Jesus at his house Luke 7:36-50) where one's own social standing may increase as a result. However, Jesus' disciples were not only of limited status, but they would also become more and more unpopular as opposition to Jesus' ministry grew. Eventually they would become persecuted. The giving "*a cup of cold water*" is another clear and obvious connection to the Final Judgment passage (25:31-46):

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'*  
[Matthew 25:34-36]

The "little ones" in this week's text is a reference to the "least of these" in the Final Judgment passage: "*And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'*" (25:50). This reaffirms the idea of the disciple as an ambassador of Christ.

### Reflections

Three themes emerge from this passage. First, these verses are very uplifting! While the world may despise, work against, or even persecute those in mission for Christ, being a disciple is presented here as a position of great privilege. No matter what the world may think, representing Jesus is also representing God. Second, these verses, along with 28:19-20, also remind us of the "sent" nature of the Church. Jesus was sent by God and Jesus sends His disciples to participate in His mission of proclaiming the Gospel in both word and deed. To be on mission is the *raison d'être* of the Church. In many cases today, *actively being sent* has become confused with *passively being open*. How does the life of the local church change if it truly lives as a sent church? Third, all baptized members of the Church are thus on mission but not all members will be missionaries. Some will *go* and be missionaries, others will be on mission *as they go* about their regular daily lives. Others may be called to pour a cup of cold water and support those who are called to *go* and be missionaries. None of us are off-the-hook, all of us in some way are on mission as those called in our generation continue the unbroken spiritual chain.

### Application

- On the spectrum of passively open to actively sent, where would you place your church? To which end of the continuum does it place.
- In what ways is your church supporting the Great Commission today?
- In what ways is your church active in the missional work to the direct community surrounding the church building?
- How are you personally called and equipped to be a laborer for the harvest?