

**Sermon - Proper 8, Year A - Matthew 10:40-42**  
**Holy Littleness**  
**7/2/23**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the year 801, a man was born who would come to be known as the “Apostle to the North.” St. Ansgar hailed from a noble Frankish family, but he was raised in a Benedictine monastery in France after the death of his parents. He became a monk himself and was soon sent to the heathen lands of Denmark as a part of a missionary congregation. In Denmark, he preached widely. He founded a series of small congregations. He resisted the pagan authorities, and sought to invite the people of the various sea villages to receive the Sacrament of baptism. For all his skill and humility, the historical records describe his efforts as being “without noticeable success.”

Soon, Ansgar was sent to Sweden. In the ninth century, Sweden was a wild realm of viking supremacy. Christians were ritually murdered. Ansgar himself was captured by pirates. He labored faithfully in the turbulent wilderness of the northlands, but when he was recalled to Germany just two years later, he lamented that his mission had wrought nothing. In Hamburg, Ansgar founded a new monastery and a vibrant library. After thirteen years of exhaustive work, viking invaders burned everything to the ground. Sweden and Denmark became pagan once again. Ansgar died at the age of 64, believing that the work of his life had been a failure.

It would not be until two centuries later that missionaries returned to Scandinavia. They prepared themselves for the heretical mobs of pagan resistance – for the untamed wilds of viking violence and rebellion. When they arrived, they were astounded to find – of all things! – churches. Thriving churches, here and there among the villages. When asked where they had heard about Jesus Christ, they replied, “from Ansgar, the holy teacher. Thanks be to God.”

Over the past several weeks, we have heard the Gospel of St. Matthew speak to us about discipleship. We have heard about Jesus gathering a rather surprising group of people to follow him. We've seen how different people from very different walks of life are called to serve alongside one another. We have seen Jesus proclaim that the disciples will work wonders they could only dream of – works of power and great beauty in the name of Jesus Christ. We have heard about how following Christ will not be a journey of leisure. They are to bring nothing with them, not even an extra tunic or pair of sandals, but rather they are to rely on the hospitality of others as they travel throughout the cities and countryside. More alarming still, they will face rejection, even persecution. They will be harassed and reviled. They will be forced to flee from place to place. Their own families may be set against them. They may even die, losing their lives for the Gospel's sake.

But nothing of their faithfulness will be lost. Today we encounter the end of Jesus' discourse here about the necessity and risk of discipleship. After all of his warnings and all of the things that have unsettled us for the past several weeks, his assurance is clear: not an ounce of your faithfulness will be in vain. Even the gift of a cup of cold water to a person in need will sing with the fullness of God's complete care and assurance. Nothing – nothing at all – will be lost.

The more years I pass within this mortal coil, the more I've come to recognize that all of us, on some level, are a bit afraid of our own insignificance. Even very illustrious, powerful people worry that no one will remember them for the right reasons. Most of us don't win Nobel Prizes or Guggenheim fellowships. Most of us aren't revolutionaries in the field of astrophysics or Oscar winners. And even those who are lie down to sleep at night and wonder...what if this is it? What if nothing I have done matters very much at all? What if the vikings have burned my library, and the pirates have returned to lives of heretical paganism? What if it's all been a waste?

Jesus is clear: nothing – nothing at all – will be lost. Nothing is without a purpose that can bring glory to God. Even a cup of cold water offered in his name brings rejoicing in heaven. Even the seasons of our lives that seem darkest or most useless – even these are accounted for in the expansive and joyful mind of God. In the Book of Common Prayer, there is section of prayers for use in the anointing of the sick. There is a collection of prayers meant for use by someone who is ill, and there is a prayer for use in the morning. The prayer goes like this: This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.”

“If I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly.”

All throughout scripture, Jesus teaches that even the ordinary substance of our lives is meant for God’s glory. Waking in the morning. Saying a small prayer when an ambulance passes on the street. Rocking a baby. Cleaning up after a loved one. Tending a garden. Fixing a tire. Welcoming a stranger. Helping a child. Reading a psalm. Reassuring a friend. Forgiving an enemy. Moment by moment, day by day, the ordinary offerings of a life become suffused by the grace of our God who does not miss even the fall of a single sparrow to the earth below. Nothing – nothing at all – is lost to him. And we can never know the full power of even our smallest acts of faithfulness and love.

It is the unbridled, unrelenting truth of the Gospel that even a cup of cold water offered in the name of Christ can quench the thirst of the whole world.