

It Doesn't Take A Lot
Cooke's-Portsmouth Church

July 2, 2017

Matthew 10:40-42

The story is told of a pastor who took a sabbatical from his pastorate and spent the time working for an organization in Mexico. A man came to speak to the group about his experience with crossing the border and working in the United States. His wife sat next to him knitting something while he shared his story. The man, who looked to be in his early 30's, told about how when his wife became pregnant they had no money and no financial hope for starting their family. So they made the decision for him to go to the U.S. and find work.

He scraped by in Mexico, saving up the \$500 it takes to pay someone to illegally lead you across the border. He paid his money, and then he walked through the desert with a group of men under cover of darkness, unable to see if there was a snake or a scorpion in their path. He walked through the blaze of unforgiving daylight, wearing holes in his shoes and becoming exhausted from dehydration. One man in his 70s collapsed from the heat, so he carried him on his shoulders the rest of the way. When they crossed the border, they were immediately intercepted by the Border Patrol and taken back.

Penniless and humiliated, he started over. He earned that \$500, he took the horrendous journey again, and this time he made it into the United States where he found work. He worked ten-hour shifts with no breaks making less than minimum wage, never stopped even when he cut his hand open washing dishes; his boss wouldn't let him stop. And since he couldn't speak English, he

couldn't express his needs, let alone defend himself under harsh treatment. After three years of saving up a little money under these conditions, he went back home, where he met his now three-year-old daughter for the first time.

At this point in the telling the pastor looked over at the man's wife. She was still knitting, still looking down; and then a tear rolled down her cheek, but she quickly wiped it away, as if it was an enemy to which she refused to succumb. Finally, a student in the group, moved by the man's story, asked, "How can we help? What can we do to change this?" The husband and father said, "Just be nicer. Don't treat us like we're horrible. Be kind."

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

Music

The story is told of a young parish priest visiting with an older priest. The young priest mentions the vagrants who come by his church seeking help. He says to his elder, "I know we're supposed to help the poor, but these people are asking for help with a bus ticket or a utility bill or gas money or food. Is that really their story? The last thing they're likely to spend that money on is the bus ticket or the utility bill or the gas tank or food. They'll probably spend it on something the Church doesn't support, something that I certainly don't support." Finally, the young priest says, "It gets exhausting justifying who I'm going to help and why." The older priest sits back and lets the young priest's words loom in the air like a confession waiting for assurance. Then the older priest says, "What business is it of yours determining who gets help and who doesn't? Why exhaust yourself with that burden? You are a follower of Jesus Christ. Your task, therefore, is

simply to share out of the wealth of God's abundance. Your requirement is simply to love others as God loves you. Your job is simply to give."

“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.”

Music

When I was covering the maternity leave in the Yukon Territory I received the request from a former parishioner to perform a wedding ceremony for a mutual friend of ours; the brother of the man that her daughter was dating at the time. The groom had been diagnosed with prostate cancer shortly after becoming engaged and his situation was precarious; requiring surgery and radiation. The wedding was scheduled for the first weekend in August and I returned at the end of May.

Hope ran high that I would find a pulpit to exercise ministry from but as the day of the wedding drew nearer and I was still seeking a job, I contacted the former parishioner and the minister serving the congregation at the time to see if I could borrow the marriage register to record the wedding. It was Presbytery Policy at the time that if a member of the clergy with a license to marry was without a church that the marriage register in the church adjacent to the home address

of the officiant be used. My request to use the register was denied by the minister and the chair of the board who was a close friend of the groom and had been invited to the wedding.

I approached a second colleague and was loaned a marriage register. When I went to pick it up I confessed that I was feeling as though I had been kicked in the stomach to which he replied, “You have been; now shake the dust from your sandals and move on.”

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Music Sung

I would be doing the text a great disservice if I told only those stories that illustrate a shortfall in living the gospel. I daresay that all of us could proffer an example or two of being treated less than Christ-like by someone who occupies a pew with regularity. But there is wisdom in the adage of many a truth is spoken in jest. And the ability to laugh is among the greatest of God’s gifts that graces the life of the believer. Laughter is a great source of proffering a figurative refreshing drink of water

An old Italian man lived alone in the country. He wanted to dig his tomato garden, but it was very hard work as the ground was hard. His only son, Vincent, who used to help him, was in prison. The old man wrote a letter to his son and described his predicament: "Dear Vincent, I am

feeling pretty bad because it looks like I won't be able to plant my tomato garden this year. I'm just getting too old to be digging up a garden plot. I know if you were here my troubles would be over. I know you would be happy to dig the plot for me. Love, Dad." A few days later he received a letter from his son: "Dear Dad, don't dig up the garden. That's where I buried the bodies. Love, Vinnie." At 4 am the next morning, FBI agents and local police arrived and dug up the entire area without finding any bodies. They apologized to the old man and left. That same day the old man received another letter from his son: "Dear Dad, go ahead and plant the tomatoes now. That's the best I could do under the circumstances. Love you, Vinnie."

A boy says, "Hey Dad, can I use the car?" "Sure, son," said the father. "Just bring your grades up, study your Bible and cut your hair. Then you can use the car." "But Samson, Moses and Jesus had long hair," argued the son. "Yes, and everywhere they went they walked," replied the father.

And whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones will not lose their reward.

Sometimes the refreshing drink of water comes when we laugh in a spirit of joy. It lightens the load. Scant weeks before she died I sat with a husband and wife who were simply awaiting the arrival of the angel of death. There was no denying the gravity of the situation and yet we kept the mood as normal as possible: More than once we laughed and I was privileged to see the loving exchanges between a devoted couple who were simultaneously drawing strength from one another and infusing one another with strength with the power of love: for better for worse; in sickness as in health; loving and cherishing until death.

It comes in the wisdom and plea of an immigrant who simply wants an opportunity to provide for his family and have a full and rich life: "Just be nicer. Don't treat us like we're horrible. Be kind."

And in the wise counsel of the sagely priest to the self-righteous upstart: "What business is it of yours determining who gets help and who doesn't? Why exhaust yourself with that burden? You are a follower of Jesus Christ. Your task, therefore, is simply to share out of the wealth of God's abundance. Your requirement is simply to love others as God loves you. Your job is simply to give."

And when you have been figuratively kicked in the stomach by a figurative Pharisee who can quote the scriptures ad nauseum but has not recorded their wisdom of the heart: "Shake the dust from your sandals and move on."

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This is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.