**It Doesn’t Take Much**

**Cooke’s-Portsmouth**

**June 28, 2020**

**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 town 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."

Two words. A complete sentence in just two words but what a challenge to incorporate kindness as second nature into our being. Even when we are reluctant to be completely honest we need to confess that there are biases with which we live and invariably need to grapple with. How many homeless people do we choose to walk by; keeping our eyes straight ahead so we need not even acknowledge their presence? To acknowledge their existence may mean that we must offer some kind of help. But to pretend not to see them means that the loonie can stay in our pocket. And what of the lonely person who is hard to escape from? We shuffle from foot to foot as they drone on; silently wishing that we were somewhere else and seeking the appropriate moment to offer our excuses and make our escape. Got to run. Places to go; people to see; things to do.

When we see a line up in front of a store because of the new normal do we quicken our step if we see someone else making a b line for the same line up? “Just be nicer. Don’t treat us like we are horrible. Be kind.”

As we have been living with the new normal and the sanctions due to a pandemic there has been a concerted effort by many to be patient. To be kind. And we have seen evidence of this. I was queued up at Costco recently and a husband had dropped off his wife to get into the line while he parked the car. As she waited and watched for him the line up behind her got longer and included my husband and myself. After a time her husband joined her and was keeping pace with her outside of the rope. The woman asked the security guard on duty if her partner could walk underneath the rope and stand with her.” I am his wife.” In jest I said, “She is not his wife I am his wife.” And from further behind me came the voice of a man saying, “No I am his wife.” Everyone laughed and it was a moment where I could see the best in humanity.

We were all trying to maintain a sense of humour and to demonstrate kindness and patience in a very demanding time. But this was before George Floyd in Minneapolis was shot by police. And Chantal Moore and Rodney Levi in Canada. And Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta. These are all persons of colour and has sparked a response throughout the world that all lives matter. Some peaceful protest has erupted into violence and has been condemned by the closest members of the families of the victims. Protest should never result in violence because this flies in the face of the intentions of the organizers. It is an end to violence and intolerance that is the desired outcome and not an excuse for violence, destruction of property or stealing. Be kind.

Welcome one another as God welcomes saint and sinner alike. Even proffering a glass of water in a simple act of kindness does not escape the notice of God. Protest without violence. Taking a knee over colluding with force and threat. In just a few verses of scripture we are challenged to think about what it means to welcome one another with equality and respect. The simple, basic acts of kindness performed by believers in a genuine act of welcome is all that is asked of us. But we still find it difficult to do void of judgment and frustration.

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."

Emilie Townses, an African-American theologian and ethicists has written Although Jesus speaks of reward in this passage, compassion should not be extended only in hope of personal gain. Love is not always met with love. Jesus made this abundantly clear to his disciples. Discipleship may include persecution and crucifixion and yet we are called to love in the midst of hate; even in those moments when it appears that hatred has the upper hand. Even something as simple as a refreshing drink of water is no small act of kindness in the eyes of God.

I got to this point in my reflection when the doorbell rang at the church. I answered and there was a community gardener standing there with a watering can requesting water for her tomato plants. I could not in good conscience deny her some water and return to this text. It would fly in the face of our understanding of Christian hospitality and acting kindly towards one in need. Her watering can was too large to be accommodated by the bathroom faucet so we made our way to the kitchen.

As we walked I heard about what she does with the yield from her tomato patch and how her tomatoes are turned into sauce and used throughout the winter. She told me that she knew a ministry colleague of mine who also had a clever license plate on her vehicle, and spoke of a kindly gardener who brings water daily to the patch for others to use. I don’t expect that there will be any lasting impact on this single act of kindness. I expect nothing in return for offering some of our water but I was reminded of how simple it can be to be as Christ to another: and whoever gives even a cup of water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-truly I tell you none of these will lose their reward.

Again from the wisdom of Emilie Townes Our will to achieve caring relationships is within our grasp yet all too often we fall short of becoming the people that God calls us to be. Pride, ego, selfishness can all keep us from connecting to one another except in self-interested ways .In these four short verses from Matthew Jesus reminds us of the superlative to simply be kind. Be welcoming; because when we are kind and when we are welcoming and when we act unselfishly for the good of another we are being as Christ in the world.

Discipleship doesn’t have to be heroic. Like all the small acts of devotion, tenderness, and forgiveness that go largely unnoticed but tend the relationships that are most important to us, so also the life of faith is composed of a thousand small gestures. Except that, according to Jesus, there is no small gesture. Anything done in faith and love has cosmic significance for the ones involved and, indeed, for the world God loves so much.

Be Kind.

Be respectful. If you disagree with another about some point of order or piece of business do it with respect and appreciation. Because even the most seemingly insignificant gesture, proffered in kindness and respect, is judged as great in the eyes of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.