

Homily June 28, 2026

Matthew 10 40-42

Good morning

It seems like Easter was a long time ago. Easter Sunday and the following Sundays in the Easter Season in which we heard about the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb, the doubt and the fear of the disciples and just before the Ascension of Jesus we heard the great commissioning of the disciples. The sending them out into the world to teach the way of Christ. But that's not where we are today in our biblical readings because after Trinity Sunday, May 31st, our Gospel readings return to an earlier time in our Bible narrative. These current readings take place during Christ's Great Galilean Ministry, roughly from the end of a AD 27 to the spring of AD 29. We have been listening to these readings for the last few weeks.

They are set in a time when Christ has chosen all of his disciples including his last disciple, Matthew, the tax collector. A time during which Jesus begins to prepare the 12 disciples for the journey that they were about to take - a physical journey as they go out into the countryside preaching and healing but also a journey in their own souls.

Listen again to what Jesus says: Go "proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Matthew 10:7-8)

But Jesus continues on to warn the disciples "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles." (Matthew 10:16-17)

These are serious and alarming words that he shares with the disciples.

Now some of the disciples have been with him for a couple years. And some like Matthew have joined him more recently. All have seen many miracles and heard many parables. All have heard him preach, have come to believe in him and to be willing to walk with him.

So after many verses of warnings we come to today's reading.

It's very short - Matthew 10 verses 40 to 42. We might ask why this reading is so important that the modern scholars who put together the readings for Sunday lectionary saw fit to use only those three verses on this Sunday?

Before the disciples go out on their first ministry these are the last words they hear: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet ... will receive a prophet's reward and whoever welcomes a righteous person ... will receive the reward of the righteous; and 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 I had been a disciple listening to all the dark and dire warnings of the verses that precede this reading I would have found these words comforting and strengthening. I think Jesus meant them to sound that way but there's more here than it appears

Jesus's first words "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me"

puts the disciples in close relationship with Jesus and through Jesus with God the Father. Jesus is saying the disciples are the very emissaries of Jesus and through him of God.

The next two paragraphs "Whoever 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" are confusing. Some of the questions here are what does Christ mean by a prophet and who could qualify as a righteous person? Bible scholars seem to think that in this context what Christ means as a prophet is one who preaches bravely and clearly about Christ's teaching. Not the classical definition of prophet perhaps but clearly one that would include the disciples risking their lives quite literally to go out to teach and testify to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

A righteous person a little easier to understand. It does not mean someone who is powerful or important in the religious community but rather one who behaves righteously - adhering to Christ's teachings as best he or she can.

But perhaps more important than whom Christ is talking about, these two verses also speak of an interactive and reciprocal welcoming and giving of blessings. The one who welcomes the prophet or the righteous one will himself receive the same reward as the prophet or righteous one. It is in the welcoming that the welcome to eternal life is received.

PAUSE

And what of the little ones? Now when I first read this verse I thought that little ones referred to the little children as in "suffer the little children ... to come into to me" but it appears that in this context little ones means Christ's followers or more specifically these 12 disciples that he is sending out.

And a cup of cold water in that dry and hot land is a token of hospitality - of hospitality and welcome.

In these few verses Jesus is not talking only to his disciples. He is talking to everyone of us. How do we welcome Christ into our lives. How do we treat prophets who may give us guidance that's hard to hear but needed to become our better selves. How do we praise the righteous who tell us and show us how to live out Christ's teachings. And finally, how do we treat the little ones?

We don't have disciples among us (at least that we recognize) but we could broaden the term little ones certainly to include those who have less than we have. How do we treat the street person who begs at a traffic stop. Do we give a cup of cold water? Do we look at that one of Christ's little ones - look them in the face and say bless you? Recognize them as Christ's own? This passage which comforted and armed the disciples embarking on their first journey of ministry can also comfort and arm us. Help us be better disciples.

I always wish I had better stories to share with you. The other preachers who you hear from this pulpit on Sundays always seem to have the most wonderful stories to illustrate their homilies. So I have been collecting some to tell you but this week I actually heard pretty much the same story twice from two different people. The gist of it is that the individual telling the story had no money on them and could not help a person asking for assistance. So instead, the individual offered a moment of prayer and in each case the person responded by saying, "Thank you, that was better than money."

What I love about these stories is they tell us not only that we can reach out and touch others but others reach in to touch us. To touch us enough so that years later we still tell the story; we still encourage other people to good acts.

So, my story is of the same ilk. I often drive through the McDonald's near my husband's nursing home to get him a chocolate milkshake. And there is an unhoused person who often stands at the corner of the McDonald's near the drive-through lane. I've gotten to know him a little bit. I know for instance that last year he saved up for an extra warm sleeping bag and he told me about it. I know that this year someone gave him a warm jacket and he was so pleased because it was brand new and the tags were still on it. I also realized after interacting with him a number of times that he has piercingly blue eyes. I didn't notice that for quite a while because it's still hard for me to look right into the face of someone that I'm giving money to. It's somehow easier to just hand the money and drive on and not see the face of Christ in that person, not see their smile, not see their eyes, not hear their stories. I don't expect to get the reward of a prophet or a righteous one but I know that when I give a cup of cold water to a little one, when I welcome Christ in them that I have already received a reward.

Amen

Jesus, our merciful and welcoming God, you who lived a life welcoming into fellowship those who so many had rejected, teach us the same spirit of hospitality.

We don't always expect the messengers you send and sometimes they show up in the people we are most likely to reject: those who think, look, or live differently than us.

Show us how to welcome the stranger in your name and receive from them all they have to offer. As we hold out the cups of water to each other, give us through this neighborliness, the gift of living water.

In your name we pray, Amen.

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