

Marti McMahon Stanley
Norwalk Christian Church
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Creating Community

Matthew 10:40-42

⁴⁰“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.”

Pray with me: Lord, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

It seems odd to preach on ‘hospitality’ and being ‘welcoming’ to a congregation that has shown my family and I what true hospitality is all about. Our expectations of a handful of people helping us unload our moving truck was far surpassed. Before we ever left Texas, we were already receiving cards in the mail and emails welcoming us to Norwalk and Norwalk Christian. Before the moving truck ever arrived here, we had a home to stay in. Before our move in day, our grass had already been cut and a tree that had fallen had already been cut and removed. On our move in day, several of you showed up to cook breakfast early that morning before heading down main street. Once there two crews formed. Two good sized crews. One crew worked to ensure all our personal belongings were brought safely into the house. The other crew worked on our yard, cutting branches, pruning bushes, and power washing our siding. A separate crew prepared lunch for all those welcoming us to Norwalk Christian. A glorious brunch was thrown, and since then we have been fed by many of you, both physically and spiritually. And we thank you. You have indeed blessed us by welcoming us with your hospitality.

Even with all this hospitality and splendid welcome, our text this morning remains the same. Jesus has gathered the twelve and is instructing them on what they need to know. He is instructing them on what they need to become his presence in this world. Welcoming someone seems so minor. We greet people all the time; hello, how are you?, a passing wave, a friendly smile, a door held open, a verbal ‘thank you’. Most of this was taught to us at a young age. It isn’t anything new. And yet, this is something Jesus is teaching his disciples to do. I don’t know how long Jesus spent instructing his disciples, but Matthew takes one chapter, 42 verses, to share with us what Jesus taught them, and welcoming someone is among those instructions.

Why? Why would something so basic, so seemingly natural get a spot on Jesus’ instruction list to the twelve? Why? Because that’s how relationships start. Jesus understood the value of welcoming someone. Of showing hospitality. Of having a

peaceful presence that greeted and welcomed everyone. Of even giving a cup of cold water.

Jesus got it. Jesus knew how relationships start. How they first begin with a greeting, a friendly hello. And once that occurrence has taken place a few times, and comfort levels are at ease, it's time to go a step farther. Perhaps by getting to know the person a little more, asking what they enjoy, or even offering them a cup of cold water. Jesus was pretty smart. There's something special about someone getting you a cup of cold water. There's a personal touch attached to things like offering someone something to eat or drink. In serving someone, you are serving Christ. In serving someone, you are serving God. And serving someone, you are being Christ's presence in our world today.

Perhaps why these simple instructions were included was because of what it implied. Jesus is instructing his disciples to welcome all, but he isn't expecting a surface level greeting to be all there is. Jesus wants them to welcome all, Jesus wants us to welcome all. But not to be satisfied with superficial greetings. The whole point of welcoming and hospitality is to get to know one another. To be in community with one another. We are to love and support, encourage and care for one another. The friendly greeting and welcome is where it all starts, but it is certainly not where it ends.

We are to be friends and neighbors to those around us. Those that are easy to love, and those that aren't so easy to love. We are to take the time to care for everyone, not just those that we know appreciate it, but those that don't always acknowledge their appreciation. We are to create a community here, in this church, in this town, that is known for welcoming all. That is known for not simply being a church that welcomes all, but one that means it. A church where someone comes in off the street not knowing anything about us and leaves saying, 'Wow! They genuinely care about each other. And they were really glad I joined them today.'

Jesus' instructions to his disciples were not simply about welcoming disciples or missionaries, it's about being Christ. Having a Christlike attitude and presence wherever we go. A friendly smile is not always met with a friendly smile. An invitation is not always met with a accepted response. And sometimes the people whom we want to deny us, our the ones who need us the most. Our selfishness stops us from being welcoming. Our fear stops us from opening our true selves up. It is in those moments, at those times, when we realize that this seemingly simple task is a discipline to discipleship.

What starts off easy, that friendly smile and invitation to join us, turns into you opening yourself up. It turns into you being vulnerable. And you allowing others to be vulnerable. It turns into friendship, and as it progresses, you realize you've created community. True community. Community that loves and cares, supports and encourages. Community that cries with one another, that rejoices with one another. Community that lifts us up when we've fallen. Community that everyone seeks to find.

Have you ever met someone who lacked a community? Someone who might have a friend or two, but who lacked real community? Have you been at a church where people

gather, smile and greet one another, but never really get to know each other? That's not the community Jesus intended for us. You were beautifully and fearfully made. And you were made for more than a social veneer. You were created for true community. For loving your neighbors, for loving your enemies, and for accepting the love of others. Know that you are worthy of such love. Know that you possess the power of that love for others.

Our reward, as stated in our text, is being part of a community. A community in which we welcome God, by welcoming Christ. A community in which we see Christ in others, and are the presence of Christ. A community that is not based on social income or status. Not one based on lineage or finances. Not one based on race or sexuality. Not on dress or appearance. But a community based on love for all who enter, for all who you meet.

Norwalk Christian, you already have that in you. You already know how to create true community. You provide meals for funerals. You gather to create and share your gifts and things you enjoy with your Craft Times. You open these doors to community programs like Senior Exercise groups and Meals on Wheels. You invite each other into your homes, serve each other, and get to know each other. A group of you take people out of eat lunch each week. And every week a rather large group of you gather around a few pots of coffee simply to share in each others lives. Why? Because, Norwalk Christian, you are creating community. This is what true community looks likes. This is what happens when it gets put in motion.

I encourage you today to continue welcoming everyone with the spirit of Christ. For each time you welcome them, you welcome God. And I encourage you not to allow that greeting to stay stagnant, but to nurture and love it into a caring relationship. I know that can be hard, I know that might mean a few rejections. But it has such a tremendous reward. Never stop welcoming. Never stop caring for people or opening yourself up to them. And above all, never stop welcoming all to this table, because I can't think of a more beautiful act of community.