

## The Small Acts of Discipleship -- Matthew 10:40-42

Norwalk Christian Church, June 28, 2020, Livestream, Proper 8, Year A

---

Our instinct, when we read a passage like this one, is to ask the question--what is this text telling me to do.

We hear these words of Jesus and then start the to-do list:

- 1) Welcome people, 2) Welcome prophets, 3) Welcome righteous, 4) Give cups of cold water.

Hearing this, we either feel accomplished--wow, I've done these things--or guilty--wow, I need to do more of these things.

It makes sense--there are plenty of texts in scripture and messages from Jesus that help us, as Disciples, understand what to do. In fact, this text follows a long discourse about what all being a disciple means, how disciples should behave and what they should do.

But that's not this text. "Whoever welcomes you..." the text begins. And it's a plural "you", by the way. "Y'all". Whoever welcomes you/Y'all"...welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

Here, Jesus isn't giving us a long todo list. All Jesus is asking us to do is to be welcomed.

Not to welcome, but to be welcomed. Not to do, but to be done to. Not to serve, but to be the one who is served.

---

My Facebook Memories a few days ago reminded me that it's been 6 years since we arrived in Norwalk and began our ministry here. As I looked back on pictures from the first time we met many of you--there you were, helping us unload our moving truck, cutting branches and bushes, pulling weeds at our home. Clint Halverson and Doug Reed. Jerri McNeeley and Doug Pierce. So many of you, helping/serving us.

There are a lot of moments over the last 6 years when we have welcomed you--but on that day, you welcomed us. It was humbling to be on the sidelines, watching your new church family do most of the work of moving you in.

It's humbling to be welcomed.

As cars lined up last week for the mobile food pantry, I visited with several of them, hearing their stories, some who had never needed to receive food assistance before.

Before recent months, they had been the one who gave, the ones who donated, the ones who volunteered. Now they were the ones receiving food, and they were simultaneously gracious and uncomfortable.

When I was 16, I had the opportunity of a lifetime to travel to Guinea, West Africa with my dad, to visit with some missionaries that our church supported. During that week, we travelled across the country, and stopped at the homes of people who our church had helped. There were no hotels. We slept at their homes. We received their hospitality.

And it was humbling. In my mind, we were there to help them, serve them, encourage them. Yet at every stop, they cared for us. They gave us the nicest room in the house. They fed us the best food they had--a meal that was more lavish than any they had eaten that year. They stopped their lives to welcome us.

I remember feeling troubled by this--they do not need to welcome us. We are here to encourage them! Yet, at every stop, every person and family we met, we saw the joy on their faces. They welcomed us, and it was--for them--a gift.

---

I'm wondering how, during this time of pandemic and economic uncertainty, how have you experienced welcome?

Maybe someone threw you a birthday parade party? Maybe an unexpected card or gift? A puzzle or a bottle of your favorite. A mayday basket? A box of food? A phone call?

How have you been welcomed? How did it feel?

We church folk are used to our to-do lists. We are used to being told all the things we are supposed to do, the people we are supposed to serve.

What we don't do, however, is allow others to serve us. We believe that we are the ones with the gifts to give. We do not receive gifts well.

I should clarify--there are plenty of church folk who think that the church and world should cater to them. Worship should be based on their preferences. Ministry should be focused on their needs. Society should be organized around their preferences and prejudices.

If that's you--you should know that's not what being a disciple is about.

A disciple is one who is sent into the world to serve the world. And this message from Jesus is directed at Disciples. But Disciples who are sent into mission are not always good at receiving mission. Those who seek to give are not always good at receiving gifts.

Whoever welcomes you, welcomes Jesus.

Welcoming others and being welcomed by others might be one of the greatest acts of discipleship we could ever do.

---

I'm reminded of a story I read a few weeks ago, in the midst of the initial Black Lives Matter protests in Des Moines. Things were heated that night in the East Village, and the owners, workers, and patrons at a bar heard about what was going on just a few blocks from where they sat.

And so, they decided to help. It should be pointed out that the "they" were the owners, workers, and patrons of the Blazing Saddle, Des Moines oldest gay bar. The Blazing Saddle is known as a historic place of refuge for many who had nowhere else to go, nowhere else where they could fully be who they truly were. It was a place that provided radical welcome.

And yet, that night in the East Village, they decided to take their welcome to the streets. They heard the protestors were coming their way. They could've been scared--a lot of business owners were that night. But instead, they decided to gather the bottles of water they had and hit the streets. They met the protestors with gifts of water. They offered care to some who had been tear-gassed. They provided welcome.

As a result, several of those who provided this welcome were arrested that night. They declared that they were only helping--they weren't even protesting--and that this was their bar--yet they found themselves in jail, waiting for bail, for giving a cup of cold water to those in need. Not everyone who welcomes others is welcomed by others.

---

I don't know what, exactly, Jesus may be calling you to. For some of us, we need to learn how to be welcomed, how to be served. For some of us, we need to realize that being a disciple could be as simple as welcoming someone else.

We often think discipleship is accomplished through great acts of sacrifice and service. And yes, it is, sometimes. But that's not all that discipleship is. Discipleship is following Jesus, even in the mundane things. Discipleship can be as simple as a card, a birthday parade, or a bottle of water. Discipleship can be accepting another's hospitality. Discipleship is showing up--everyday--and doing those small acts of love and welcome, things that seem so small and insignificant, yet are the very things that change the world.

So let me officially say--thank you. Thank you for your acts of discipleship. Thank you for those small gestures. Thank you, for welcoming our family, and for welcoming so many people. For whenever you serve someone, welcome someone--you are welcoming Jesus. It seems small, but it's one of the biggest acts of discipleship you can do. Amen.