

Pastor Jon's Sermon from June 28, 2020

Text: Matthew 10:40-42

“Finding Jesus in the Gift of Hospitality.”

Think of a time when you felt fully welcomed or accepted. What did that feel like? Whoever it was who welcomed you put a lot of thought into how they welcomed you. You got the feeling that you were the most important person in the world to them. You were just thankful to be accepted. Now think of a time when you felt unwelcome or rejected. You knew it when you walked in the room. You could feel people looking at you.

A feeling of welcome is something God wants for all people.

I remember a time when we felt fully welcomed. Jeranna and I were passing through Dubuque, IA, one summer with Annika. I went to seminary in Dubuque, IA, at Wartburg Theological Seminary. I wanted to see one of my former professors, Dr. Jim Bailey, who was my Professor of New Testament. I was his student assistant one year, and I went to the Holy Land on a study tour with Jim and his wife, Judy. They are amazing people who are passionate about peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. I still receive emails from them about actions happening that need our prayers or support in the Middle East and in our congress.

When we walked into the Bailey's, we were immediately offered something cold to drink and were ushered to their outdoor seating area, where a spread of food was already laid out on the checkered tablecloth. They knew we had a toddler with food allergies, so they took this to heart. On the table was fresh cut tomatoes and cucumbers from the garden. There were various cold cuts and cheeses on a platter. There were different kinds of breads, crackers, and condiments. No stone was left unturned... all the fix in's for a sandwich or salad were there. Oh, and I can't forget the fresh homemade potato salad she made. There was an abundance of fresh fruit, too. You could just pick and choose what you wanted on your plate. We really ate well that day and had wonderful conversation. They recently sent Annika a graduation card that expressed how hard

it must have been to move during her senior year and graduating during a pandemic. They lamented for my daughter's losses, but also expressed a word of hope for her.

In our Gospel for today, Jesus says to his disciples who were being sent out into mission, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me." So first of all, Jesus is telling the disciples to go out... to leave their safe places and go out in mission like sheep in the midst of wolves. He is telling them to go out into the world as a vulnerable minority to speak an alternative message of hope and healing to people suffering under Roman imperial rule. This wouldn't be an easy mission and it won't always be accepted, but to go anyway.

And when the disciples are welcomed into households or towns, those offering hospitality will receive the very presence of Jesus himself and of the one who sent him, God the Father. In other words, when you are fully welcomed and accepted, Jesus promises to be present in that exchange. If you share a prophetic message and they accept it, they will receive a prophet's reward, which is the promise of heaven Jesus taught back in the Sermon on the Mount. If they welcome a righteous person in the name of a righteous person, they will receive the reward of the righteous, which is also the promise of God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. What it boils down to is action. Just the act of being welcomed, means God is present. God wants all people to experience welcome. Jesus says, "When someone offers a cold cup of water to one of these little ones in a disciple's name, truly I tell you none of these will lose their reward."

Offering a cup of cold water to a little one is an important concept in Matthew's gospel. It literally in the original Greek means children. But even more so, it is metaphor for people who are the most vulnerable in society, the little ones, the widows, the orphans, the outcasts... or later in Matthew's Gospel in Matthew 25, the least of these. Jesus says, for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was naked and you clothed me. "What you have done to the least of these you have done unto me." Says Jesus. The reward for those who offered

hospitality to the least of these without even knowing they were doing it to Jesus himself inherited the Kingdom of Heaven. And an inheritance is a free gift. This is the promise of our faith and baptism in Jesus Christ.

Again, we need to try to read this text from the perspective of the little ones... of those who experience rejection, discrimination, and don't feel welcome.

We often turn the text around where we and the ones that must do the welcoming. We read this from a place of privilege, at least I do. Normally I feel welcomed as a white male, I don't know what it feels like to be discriminated against, or turned away... for example like a black person, or a person with a disability, or a person in the LGBTQ community. They might hear this text from the perspective of all the times they didn't feel welcome.

I recall a time in Detroit at the ELCA Youth Gathering. We were called on to clean up dilapidated houses in neighborhoods of Detroit. The most memorable moment of the whole trip for me was when a neighbor, an African American woman, invited me and a few others to join her on her porch for a glass of lemonade and conversation. She had 3 generations living with her. This was the best lemonade I ever tasted because it came from her. She felt Jesus' presence in our midst.

I am convicted by this text because I am often caught up in my own world lately. This pandemic is giving me a survival mentality where I am not going out as much and serving others. But in the small interactions I have with my family, neighbors, in stores, or at church, I can practice God's dream of welcoming all. I love it when my neighbors, who are Catholic call me Pastor Jon when I am out mowing the lawn. They make me feel welcome. Or another neighbor who offered me plants for our yard.

As a church, we have to remember that all the baptized are sent into the world to tell and embody the good news of Jesus Christ. Our savior's has a strong missionary impulse. All are sent to bear Christ to others with humility and vulnerability, being willing to risk rejection.

This week, look for the little ones. And maybe it is you. Look for Christ who is always moving us to a place of welcome. Find ways to offer welcome with your eyes, if you are wearing a mask. Call out injustices if you see them.