

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, July 2, 2023, based on Matthew 10:40-42. "Christian Hospitality Can Have a Ripple Effect"

There is a word game on the Game Show Network my Dad used to love called Chain Reaction. Letter clues from one word can help you complete the chain.

Jesus says in our Gospel whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. A ministry of hospitality and welcome sets off a chain reaction.

I like to say, if you love-on my kids, you are loving-on me. The same goes for our 4 legged friends.

I can think of many times in my career as a pastor when we have been on the receiving end of wonderful Christian hospitality... whether it is when we have been traveling or in town. I think of countless meals, food drop offs, or people who offer to watch our kids or pick them up when we needed help as overstretched parents. To my kids the church is people with names. It's not the building. It is food. A shower and fresh linens. And my hope is that our young people can get to know all you saints in the congregation by name, like Cheers. That means work for all of us in extending our bridge.

Speaking of hospitality and welcome. I recently attended the Neenah Powerlifting Banquet for my son Ezra and the team. They traditionally have it in the summer, which I didn't know. All day long I thought to myself, why is this so late after school? How long will it be? It was scheduled for 3 hours. I don't want to go. But, after all was said and done, I felt blessed to attend.

We started with a picnic meal outside and then went inside for the program. Coach Joe Lewis, who has been coaching Neenah Powerlifting along with other coaches for 34 years, clearly put a lot of effort into the banquet as he made a 30-minute slide show featuring every lifter in the program. Then he handed out awards and talked another half hour. You can tell Joe cares deeply for the growth and well-being of each kid in his program whether they are there for state or national titles or for just being on a team. He choked up as he talked about his graduating seniors. Joe feels the lessons students

learn in powerlifting can carry through the rest of their lives. He also loves inspirational quotes. Joe said that even after you leave the program you can call him or any of the coaches at any time. One story he told made me cry. One night he got a call from a former lifter who was in crisis. Joe got a call and went and sat with them for 6 hours before taking them to the hospital for help. If he goes to that length for a former lifter, I know my son and his teammates will be well cared for during their lifting career.

When Jesus talks about receiving welcome, he is talking to his disciples who are being sent out to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Earlier Jesus said they will experience rejection. If that's the case, shake it off and move on to the next house or town. If people do receive them, consider it a gift. In that case, they are receiving Jesus as well. If you host a prophet, the reward you get is that you get to share a meal with the prophet and hear their testimony. If you stay with another believer, you can learn from them about their faith and love for Jesus and see how they offer hospitality.

Jesus is lifting up those who hear the doorbell and open the door. It is about the one who takes your coat or offers you a cool drink. In his day it is the ones who washed your feet. It is about the one who sets the table, cooks the meal, and or cleans up after you. It is about all those non glamorous roles that happen to make our stay go well. I heard a quote: "If you want to become the perfect guest, then try to make your host feel at home."

The reward for the giver of hospitality isn't what happens after we die, it is the beginnings of a friendship. When you eat with someone, you will be closer to them.

In the end of this section Jesus says, 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.”

Little ones could refer to children, or elderly, or the most vulnerable among us. It could be those who can't repay you. A cup of cold water could be a metaphor for anything a person needs.

A dozen or so of us from the church shared a meal with the residents and staff of the Bletzinger house on Thursday. We provided the food, they provided the venue, the drinks, set-up, paper products, and utensils. Instead of just donating money to their new bathroom project, we wanted to accompany them. We got to eat with the residents who struggle with mental health and addiction, or both. The reward we received was watching them line up and fill their plates and eat. Some were open to visiting, while others just wanted to eat and go. It didn't matter. They knew what they needed that moment. I get anxious too in some social situations.

Finally, think of the hospitality Jesus offers us on the cross! His arms were wide open embracing us and all our sins. Think of the hospitality we receive in Holy Communion, where all are equal. Luther says "We are all beggars" as we come forward with open hands to receive God's grace and forgiveness.

How can we share that love and grace we receive from Jesus with others and start a chain reaction?

Amen!