

Matthew 10: 40-42

Grace and peace to you from God our father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Holding the note in her hand, she just couldn't believe what it said. So she reads it over and over again, and just couldn't believe it. "I'm going to come and visit tonight. See you in a bit, Love, Jesus." She was so overcome with emotion while reading it, and then she got worked up for a different reason. You see, she wasn't a wealthy woman, and she really didn't have a lot of money. But she wanted to be able to welcome Jesus. She wanted to be able to at least offer him something to eat.

So she counted the money that she had...it wasn't much...just a few dollars, but she knew it would be enough to buy a small, humble meal, and so she rushed out into the cold to get some food before her visitor came, because after all, she didn't want to miss Jesus' visit.

As she was coming home from the store, she passes an alley that she walks by everyday, and she usually never looks down it, but for some reason as she is rushing home tonight with her humble bag of food, she looked down the alley, and something caught her eye. Actually, it was a someone... two someone's. A man and a woman were sitting in the alley, and as she looked down it in her hurry to get home, the man said, hey lady...can you help us? She stopped in her tracks, and looked at the man, hesitating. Without even thinking, she responded, "I'm sorry. I have a very important guest coming tonight, and I have to get home."

"That's ok...my wife and I are just really hungry and don't have anywhere to go. Thanks anyway."

Looking down at her meager bag, she thought to herself, well, I'm sure that I can find something at home to make. "Here. Take this...I'll find something else." Handing over the bag of food, she looked back at the man's wife and couldn't help but notice that she didn't have a coat on in the cold weather. "Here, take this, too. I have another one at home."

As she walked quickly away, she was worried about what she was going to serve Jesus when he came to her house, and she realized that she was walking faster because she was cold, too.

When she got home, she waited and waited, and the doorbell never rang, and there wasn't a knock at the door. Disappointed, she figured that she had missed her important visitor and began to get ready for bed. She picked up her Bible to read before sleeping, a note fell out, and for the second time that night, she looked at the writing in disbelief and awe. Thank you for the wonderful meal, it filled me up. And thank you for the beautiful new coat...I was cold and now I am warm. You are a blessing. Love, Jesus.

This is one of those stories that we've probably all heard a version of at some point. But have we really heard it? And have we heard it in light of the Gospel that seems so simple and yet so hard to follow that we heard today.

Sometimes doing simply things for other people is second nature to us, we don't even think about it. Maybe, like the woman in our story, we do things for others that might cause us to be uncomfortable or to give something up for a bit, but we do it anyway. Either way, we probably don't think that we are fulfilling Christ's command to his disciples and to us.

We hear our text for today, and we think, well, that's not so hard. I can give cold water to someone. But we need to understand that this wasn't such a simple task in the time that these words were written. To give someone a cup of COLD water...not lukewarm, room temperature water that had been sitting around in a jar all day, but truly cold refreshing water, that would quench the thirst of a weary traveler, would actually take some work. It would mean going to the well, drawing water from as far down as possible, because the farther down, the colder it was, and then quickly getting it to the person who was going to

drink it before it could have a chance to warm up. It was something that took extra effort, and the effort would be much appreciated, and as Jesus tells his disciples, much rewarded.

So what is the cold water that we can give today? Because, cold water really isn't that much of a big deal. But what can we give to those who are strangers, those who are the least, those who are the little ones that Jesus is talking about?

Maybe it would be giving of something that you think that you need like the woman in our story. Giving your meal, giving your coat, giving of yourself so that others are able to have their needs met. And this is something that I know many of you here at Trinity already do. I am marveled at how often I come into the building here and the baskets for the food pantry are full of food that Trinity Members have donated to those who cannot provide for themselves. To give something that is truly a necessity in life is something that we don't always have the opportunity to do and we might be hesitant when that opportunity arises, but it is what we are called to do.

But looking at the rest of this text, well, I have to tell you, that my first impression was that Trinity was full of righteous people. Maybe you don't think of yourselves as that, but from my experience, and looking at this text, that's just what you are. For you see, as my year here is coming to an end...something that I'm not really ready to think about yet, I can look back on the beginning of my time here with you and see that I was welcomed. You had no reason to welcome me; you had no idea of really anything about me. All that you knew was that I was in school and training to become a pastor, to answer a call of my own, and yet, you welcomed me.

In our Gospel for today, we have a short snippet of Christ's instructions to his disciples as he is sending them out. There is much more to these instructions than what we heard today. He is telling that about the hard things that they might face, the way that they are to travel and even what to take with them. Some of the instructions might even seem a bit frightening, and so that disciples are a bit nervous...at least, I would have been. And I'm not saying that I'm one of the chosen disciples, but I was sent to this place. And I was nervous. It's never easy to come to a new place, as the new kid on the block. As the one with expectations placed on them, as the one to follow someone else.

But Jesus tells the disciples, the ones called to serve, that there will be expectations for them. He tells them that there might not be people to welcome them everywhere. But those who do...those who open their hearts and their homes and their lives to them, they are not only welcoming those who stand there in front of them to teach and lead, but they are welcoming Christ himself.

So where does that leave us today? With a good pat on the back and a good feeling that hey, we welcomed that one person into this place and hey, aren't we great? Well, that's part of it, and it gives me a chance to start saying thank you. But at the same time, there are many more to welcome. Each of those empty seats that you see around you are a chance to welcome that person into our midst...welcome them to the table set before us...welcome them with a prophets welcome, just simply assuming that they are a righteous person and that they have been put here for a reason. It is in that welcoming that we might offer that cold water, or that coat, or that bread and wine that is so vital to life. And it is in that welcoming that we can know that we are welcoming not only the stranger into our midst, but we are welcoming Christ as well...When you do that, you are doing what Christ called us to do. When you welcome others, you are welcoming Christ. No small task, but it is what we are called to do.

So let us welcome one another, and let us welcome the stranger...and let us rejoice that we have been welcomed into Christ's family, and that we are called to do his work. Amen.