



“Small Cups, Big Rewards”

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday, July 1 and 2, 2017

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Matthew 10:40-42

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

So, here's something about me you probably don't know, and aren't interested in, but I'm going to tell you anyway. My maternal great-grandfather was born and raised in Italy. And my maternal grandmother was born and raised in Finland. Both of them came to the United States through Ellis Island in the second decade of the 1900's (it was 1910, and 1916, respectively). Being immigrants, they faced some uphill battles: learning the language; finding a job; and being accepted by not only their ethnic communities, but by the native-born communities.

On the Brock side, my father had done research, and determined that our ancestors have been in North America since the early 1700's. I have an ancestor who fought in the civil war (he lived in North Carolina, I'll let you figure out which side he fought on); *and* I am descended from a Brock who was born in the Virginia **colony**, who fought in the War for Independence. Because my father was born and raised in North Carolina, I, for many years, when asked about my ethnic heritage, would reply that I am a quarter Italian, a quarter Finnish, and half Southern.

My **paternal** grandmother had told us stories that we were part Cherokee, which few of us believed. She also said that we were Scot-Irish, which made a little *more* sense, because her maiden name was *Laird*, which is Scottish for *lord*.

So, this past Christmas, Marianne gave me one of those DNA kits. I spit into the tube, and sent it off to get analyzed. I was interested to see how “accurate” this DNA test was going to be, because, *obviously*, I already knew what my genealogy is. When I received the results, I was not surprised to see that I was, overall, 92% of European origin (well, *duh!*). Of that 92%, 22% comes from Italy/Greece (which is definitely my great-grandfather side). What surprised me the most, however, were, First, that my maternal grandmother's background was deemed to be only 9% Finnish/Northwestern Russian. I am, according to this DNA test, 19% Scandinavian - which, for the uninitiated, is Norway and Sweden, **not** Finland (and it also means that all those Norwegian jokes I have made at the expense of my mostly Norwegian brother-in-law for the last forty years are about to come back around and bite me).

The Second interesting to me item that I am, apparently, thanks to my grandmother Laird, 22% . . . *Irish*. Now, having grown up in the suburbs of Chicago, under the

incumbency of “hizzonner da mare” Richard J. Daley, or, for those of you who don’t speak Chicago, *his honor, the mayor* Richard J. Daley. If you don’t know, Richard J. Daley was a major figure in one of the political parties in the 1950’s & 1960’s. And I am also fairly certain, that my great-grandparents continued to vote for him long after they died. So, I grew up having a, let’s say, certain *opinion* concerning those of Irish decent.

I am a whole slew of different backgrounds. I have cousins who are, probably, three-quarter-ish Finnish / Scandinavian, because their parent who was not my relative was of full Finnish descent. And I have other cousins who are, probably, three-quarter-ish Italian, because their mother was of full Italian heritage. But me? My background is, apparently, a **Mutt**.

Yet isn’t it interesting, in our gospel reading, that Jesus, this guy who is pretty much unquestionably of Jewish heritage (go back and read his genealogy in Matthew Chapter 1 - although, you *will* find a few, intriguing, *non-Jewish* influences), isn’t it interesting that, at a time when the religious leaders of the day, at least, are saying to check someone’s Jewish heritage, or their political leanings, before aid is offered, Jesus says **this**:

^{10:40} **C** *Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me;*

and then he goes on and gives a few more examples:

whoever welcomes a prophet;
whoever welcomes a righteous person; and,
whoever gives a cup of cold water.

Jesus says that we are to welcome *in his name*. Welcome, **not** to check and see if whoever we’re welcoming is Jewish; **not** to verify that whoever we’re welcoming has similar ideology to us. No. Jesus says, *welcome them in my name, and receive my reward*.

That last phrase - receive a reward - can set off a red flag, it can be a little bit of a sticky wicket for us and our Lutheran heritage. Because that sounds a little too much like *Works Righteousness*, and not enough like *We are saved by grace through faith* (remember that Martin Luther defined *works righteousness* as meaning that we have to **earn** God’s grace, we have to work for God’s love and forgiveness. Luther reminded us that Ephesians says *We are saved by grace through faith*, meaning they are **freely given**).

To understand what Jesus means, we have to remember that he is saying this “Welcome and Earn Reward” stuff at the **end** of chapter 10. We’ve been hearing Matthew Chapter 10 for the past several weeks as our gospel reading. Jesus is saying this *After* he has talked about how his followers are going to be persecuted and prosecuted for their belief. He is saying this *After* he has said that we need to love God **above all else** - above things, above what we do, above even our own family. So, *part* of what he means with this *give a cup of water stuff* is: hang in there. And *part* of what he means is:

if someone comes in my name it does not matter if they are Roman or Jewish or

*Samaritan or Finnish or Italian or Irish or whatever; **IF** they come in my name, Jesus says we are to welcome them.*

With that understanding, “you’ll be rewarded” then means “because that’s what I, Jesus, want you to do.”

Yet too often we approach a situation with our preconceived notions in full effect. ‘Oh, this person in the schlubby clothes who wants to talk to me **must** be from a lower economic background than I am. I need to be careful in my conversation.’ ‘Oh, this person with a long beard and darker skin and scarf wrapped around his head, whose first language is obviously *not* English. I’m not certain I can trust them.’ To that kind of thinking, Jesus says,

*Do they come in my name, looking for a cup of water? Then welcome them. Do they look different than you? Doesn't matter. Are they in some other economic stratus? Doesn't matter. Is their native tongue not your native tongue? Doesn't matter. Do they come in my name? Are they asking for a lot, or a little? The size of the cup doesn't matter. If they **come in my name**, then welcome them. Everything else. Does. Not. Matter.*

We who are baptized are called to serve those who come in Christ’s name. Regardless if they look like us, regardless if they sound like us, regardless if they are of the same economic or ethnic or educational background, Jesus says:

Give them a cup of water in my name. Receive my grace, love, and forgiveness as your reward.

Amen.

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