

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost  
June 28, 2020  
Matthew 10:40-42  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Greenville

Hear a reading of the holy gospel according to St. Matthew.  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*[Jesus said to the twelve:] “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and 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.”*

This is the gospel of our Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

I come to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and I bring you his love. Amen.

There’s a pastor who I know who, every time I hear him speak, I walk away feeling guilty or feeling inadequate or feeling like I’m not doing my part to save the world.

He talks a lot about the things that are wrong with the world — global warming and racial injustice and the evils of fracking and the lack of universal health care in our country and on and on and on. When he’s talking about these things, he always has specifics about what we as Christians should be doing, like, if you are not writing your congresspeople about this, you’re not doing enough. If you’re not marching against fracking, you’re not doing enough. If you’re not ..... whatever .... you’re not doing enough.

Meaning, if I’m not doing these things he thinks I should be doing, then I am part of the problem.

Which is why I usually try to avoid him now at events, because honestly, who wants to be constantly told that they’re slackers and are part of the reason the world is messed up? Or that it’s our duty as Christians to care about all the things

he cares about at the level of animation and fervor he summons as he cares about these things?

So I was really relieved a couple of years ago when I read this thing someone wrote that said we all have a part to play in the world, and we can't all care about everything with the same level of commitment and engagement.

Which meant it was OK that someone might focus on women's issues and the pay inequity among workers in our country; someone else might focus on the melting of the icebergs; someone else might focus on lifting up the work of first responders who are health-care workers or firefighters or police officers; someone else might focus on feeding ministries.

You get the idea.

What this person wrote is that if we all spent time all of our time trying to fix the world in all manner of ways, we would end up being physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and financially bankrupt. We'd spend every ounce of energy we have and have nothing left. But if we all do our piece to make the world better, it's not only more effective, but it gives us time to have joy and fun and sabbath — a time for rest — in our lives.

It was a relief to read that article. It was like a weight was lifted. It reminded me that I wasn't a slacker, but was human, and didn't have to do all things.

Now, all of these things that I mentioned and more are things we SHOULD care about as Christians. All of these things are Biblically rooted — we care about the world because it's God's good creation; we care about people having enough food, medical care, adequate housing because we're taught that every human is a child of God and should be treated with dignity and respect.

Often times we hear scripture as a mandate and think we have to do something big and bold in response.

But today's Gospel reading maybe gives us a little bit of a different idea, with Jesus saying to his disciples that anyone who gives even a cup of water to one of these little ones — none of these will lose their reward.

Anyone who gives even a cup of water.

Think about that. Giving a cup of water. An act that small, giving a cup of water, can make Jesus known, and therefore can make known the God who sent him.

Think about all these small acts that you have given, and that you have received. Think about the cup of water extended. A hug. A dinner for a shut-in. A shoulder for someone to cry on. A couple of hours spent on a meal at the Good Shepherd Center. Five or ten bucks to someone asking for money. They're all a cup of water.

This teaching of Jesus that Matthew records happens after the Sermon on the Mount in the time when Jesus sends his disciples out to do all the things he's been doing ... to take the word of God to the people, to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to tell them that the kingdom of God has come near.

The disciples are sent out without any money and without any suitcases of extra stuff. They'll rely solely on the generosity of people, as Jesus does.

Jesus reminds them not everyone will welcome them or accept them. This is where these few lines we hear today come in. Jesus tells the disciples that those who welcome them are also welcoming him. And in welcoming him, they are welcoming the one who sent him ... God. He tells them that those who extend to them a drink of water are extending the drink of water to him, and that act of mercy will not be forgotten.

This line points ahead to the parable later in Matthew, when Jesus says, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink" (25:35), and "truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me" (25:40).

A drink of water ... it is the smallest act.

There's a story written by someone named Loren Eiseley about a star thrower, a guy who tosses starfish after starfish into the sea.

The story is: There's a man who's out early in the morning at the beach, watching the sun rise, watching the waves. He sees one man on the beach, and he's picking things up and throwing them into the waves. When he gets closer, he sees the beach is littered with starfish, and the man is tossing starfish after starfish back into the sea.

So he asks the guy what he's doing, and the man says that the tide has gone out and the starfish have been left behind, stuck in the sand. If he doesn't get them back into the water soon, they'll dry out and die.

Looking at the beach strewn with thousands of starfish, the first man says to him ... "but there are thousands of them. How can you possibly hope to make any difference?"

To which the guy throwing the starfish into the water says, "To the ones I throw back, it makes all the difference in the world."

To the starfish, being back in the sea makes all the difference. To the person receiving a drink of water, it may make all the difference. To the person receiving that hug, that meal, that gift, that shoulder, it may make all the difference.

These acts, however small we think they are, make a difference.

Sometimes we think we need to save the world. But because it is Jesus who has promised to come in time to redeem all in love, to fix all damage, heal all hurts, and wipe the tears from every eye, we can until then devote ourselves to acts of mercy and deeds of compassion small and large, not trying to save the world — Jesus has promised to do that! — but simply trying to care for the little corner of the world in which we have been placed.

A cup of water ... this small act ... given for a thirsty, thirsty world.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.