

## **Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist**

### **Matthew 10:40-42**

“Those who receive you are also receiving me, and those who receive me are receiving the One who sent me. Those who receive a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Those who receive a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. I assure you that everybody who gives even a cup of cold water to these little ones because they are my disciples will certainly be rewarded.”

#### **1. Hospitality**

Father Daniel Berrigan shares some ancient Welsh laws of hospitality:

“Three things which, according to politeness, should be prepared for guests: a kind and affectionate reception, a ready and handsome provision, and a friendly conversation.”

“Three things which, according to politeness, should not be asked of a guest: where he came from, his worldly condition, and the place of his destination.”

Hospitality is among the most ancient of human traditions. On the most basic level, it’s about providing the essentials of life for another person, especially another person who’s on a journey. Food, water and a roof over the head: the essentials.

But it’s about more than that. The offering of hospitality brings two people, guest and host, closer. They make a connection.

Many of us contribute to charitable causes, especially those that aid the needy. As we sign the check or click “enter” to send a contribution electronically, we feel we’ve done our part to ease some of the world’s woes.

But that’s not the same as what Jesus recommends in Matthew 10, verse 42: “.....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.”

Jesus is advocating a true hands-on mission experience. Don’t just send money, keeping the needy at arm’s length. Get right in there and help God’s suffering children with your own two hands.

Just a cup of water: how ordinary! But a cup of cold water handed over personally to a person who’s thirsting for it: that’s extraordinary!

## **2. Welcome, Inc.**

The lady of the house was giving last minute instructions to her butler before the start of a huge dinner being held at the estate: “Bentley, I want you to stand at the front door and call the guest’s names as they arrive.” Bentley replied, “Very well, madam. I’ve been wanting to do that for years.”

One of the occupational hazards of being a butler is that you have to be welcoming to people who aren’t particularly welcome-able. Actually, it isn’t just butlers who have that experience. Waiters and waitresses have to put up with patrons who aren’t always very pleasant or exactly welcome-able. I know this from experience—I delivered pizzas in an earlier part of my life. I am also ashamed to admit I have been one of those grumpy customers!

Mormon missionaries and Jehovah’s Witnesses are, in contrast, usually polite and pleasant. Still, few of us are thrilled when they, or any evangelists, come knocking, as we hear in the following story.

Two church members were going door to door. They knocked on the door of a home where the woman who opened it was not happy to see them. She told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message and slammed the door in their faces. To her surprise, however, the door did not close. In fact, it bounced back open. She tried slamming the door again, really putting her back into it. The result was the same—the door bounced back open. Convinced that the unwanted callers must be sticking a foot in the doorway, she reared back to give it a slam that would teach them a lesson. One of the two said, “Ma’am, before you do that again, you need to move your cat out of the way.”

While it is true that door-to-door salespeople are getting rarer and rarer these days, they do have modern descendents: Telemarketers, computer spam, and pop-up window advertising are some of the unwelcome curses of the digital age.

Being welcoming and being welcome-able—as important as those characteristics are in sales, they are even more fundamental to what the kingdom of God is all about.

### **3. Jesus says**

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is finishing his instructions to the disciples before he sends them out. He tells them that those who received them received Him. Those who received Him would receive the One who sent Him. Because of the disciples, people would believe in Jesus, and they would believe in God. Those who would receive a prophet would receive a prophet’s reward; likewise for a righteous person. Those who would give a cup of cold water because of the disciples would certainly be rewarded.

## **4. Welcome**

Mister Rogers famously sang, “Won’t you be my neighbor?” to begin his television show. He was a pastor, encourager, and educator of children. His work and life focused on being kind and inclusive. His work and life also were focused on teaching. He knew that children are our present and our future. He knew that welcoming a little child is the greatest gift we can give to the world.

Matthew’s use of the phrase “little ones” may be about children, but it also may have meant His disciples, those new to the faith community, those young in their beliefs, or those at risk in the world. It was definitely about inviting others into the journey, taking care of their needs, and taking care of the least or “little ones.” Jesus prepares His twelve disciples to go out into the world. Welcome is a pivotal word in Jesus’ teaching.

We have to be honest and say that welcome is not one of our favorite words as it is used in the church. For many, welcome is equated with simple tolerance of those different from themselves. To many who visit churches who claim to “welcome” them, there is a distinct level of distrust. Most marginalized persons much prefer a place that exhibits radical hospitality and full inclusion than mere “welcome.” This is definitely not the sentiment that I hear when Jesus uses the word. He was instituting a practice of hospitality for His disciples on their mission of spreading the good news. If anyone welcomed one of them, they were indeed welcoming Jesus and, by extension, God the Creator. We can reclaim this word for the church by exhibiting the kind of welcome that Jesus is asking of us.

## **5. Evangelism**

We are once again reminded about the need to evangelize others. Unfortunately, the “e” word has taken on many negative connotations over the last few decades. A lot of people see evangelism as a loud, judgmental,

and in-your-face practice. The word evangelism can bring about images of knocking on doors, asking if those inside have “found Jesus,” or handing out tracts on street corners declaring the doo of those who do not follow Jesus. Still, the need—the imperative—to share the good news is part of our commission as disciples of Jesus. Sharing the ways we have been reconciled and forgiven by Christ is part of truly being a disciple. Many Christians are nervous about sharing their faith. We can evangelize by our words and our actions in profound ways. Telling the story of our faith can bring lost ones into the welcoming arms of Jesus. This is a word many need to hear.

## **6. Shake It Off!**

One of the greatest deterrents to our spiritual progress is our inability to shake off the things done to us by others. We can't get on with our lives because we are still angry and hurt by another's sin against us. We must find ways of redirecting our antagonism into something higher. We must channel our hurt, our anger, our despair, and our disappointment into something positive. Let go. Unpack the baggage. Stop wallowing in the quagmires of the past. Get your passport stamped and move on to higher ground, to your next destination.

Jesus tells His disciples if the people do not receive you, don't get stuck. Don't waste your life away crying crocodile tears; “shake” the dust from your feet and keep on moving. Don't get put in spiritual, emotional, and psychological jail by the things other people do to you. After it's done, don't give them the keys to your jail cell by living in solitary confinements of unhappiness and pain.

## **7. Simple Caring**

Gene remembers Mrs. Sherman's first-grade class. They had waited for the field trip to the observatory. Notices had been sent home with

instructions about the bus, lunch, and times of departure and return. To the students, waiting for the field trip was like waiting for Christmas.

Finally, the day arrived. They grabbed their lunches and coats and lined up for the bus. In the back of the room, one boy began to cry because he had forgotten to bring a lunch and would have to stay behind with another teacher. In a few minutes, the other children had contributed extra sandwiches, fruit, desserts, and drinks until the boy had a feast for his lunch. With tears of gratitude, the boy grabbed his coat, lined up, and climbed onto the bus.

They had given the boy a “cup of cold water.” Acts of service are not always dramatic or earth-shattering. Simple caring is all that is needed. Discipleship means being alert for opportunities to care, to demonstrate God’s loving-kindness, and to teach others to do the same.