

A Cup of Cool Water
Matthew 10:40-42
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Bill Gates concluded his 2007 commencement address at Harvard, “I hope you will judge yourselves not on your professional accomplishments alone, but also on how well you have addressed the world’s deepest inequities ... on how well you treated people who have nothing in common with you but their humanity. “

Today’s Gospel passage comes at the end of one of Jesus’ long speeches to his disciples. This one concludes his commissioning them to go out and serve, to be workers for God’s harvest.

They are commissioned, set apart, for a ministry to the lost and helpless. They are told what to bring, and more importantly, what not to bring. They are told what to say, that they may not be warmly welcomed, and that their priorities, especially in relationships have to be in order. Which brings us to today’s passage.

Matthew chapter 10 reminds me of so many of those Go and Serve mission trips I led over the years. Before each trip, we did our best to prepare students kids for the trip, by spending time talking about what to pack and what to leave home; Of how to behave and to be prepared to be outside our comfort zones, both literally and figuratively. As a leader, I enjoyed having the control of having the keys and able to escape for a bit, if only to get a treat of a gourmet morning coffee.

The disciples, on the other hand, had been told they were to serve from a place of need, and really be at the mercy of the kindness of strangers.

In Matthew 10:40-42, Jesus talks about welcome. Not just a kind greeting, but welcome as a Verb. What does it mean to welcome?

Welcome could certainly mean hospitality, graciously opening our homes to our guests.

One pastor¹ shared these 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 friendly conversation.

¹ Father Daniel Berrigan from sermons.com

- 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.

Biblical hospitality, in ancient Israel, was not merely a question of good manners, but a moral institution. Biblical welcome was mandated by custom ("for you were strangers in a strange land" (from Lev. 19:34) or the passage from Genesis a couple of weeks ago, "As soon as Abraham saw the three men "from afar," he hurried to invite them into his house, ministered to their physical comfort, and served them lavishly (Gen. 18).²

Biblical hospitality included food and a place in one's home to spend the night. Biblical welcome could be dangerous.

I remember my first trip to Cuba, arriving in an authoritarian country where I didn't speak the language and we were cautioned about eating and drinking only "safe" food. When we arrived that hot July, we were greeted so warmly with deep hugs and kisses on both cheeks. Perhaps the most welcome part of our greeting, was safe, cool, water waiting on the bus for us as we traveled from the airport to our church home for the week. Our sister congregation in Luyano has a Living Waters for the world purification system and it is literally a life-line in the Luyano neighborhood of Havana. I read recently that local taxi drivers in the city know Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyanó, as the "water church."

Back before the pandemic, we here First Pres did *our* best to provide a warm welcome on Sunday mornings. We tried to notice who was around us, and make sure to introduce ourselves to an unfamiliar face. We did our best to make sure we introduced visitors to others, strove to make a connection with them, and helped them to find the coffee and donuts. Ah remember when we shared donuts together?

But that was then.

The church has left the building.

We are out in the world.

We worship from home now and do our best to protect ourselves and others by wearing masks when we step outside. Isn't it hard to recognize people or see a smile behind a mask? It is tricky to be welcoming, when we need to stay 6' apart from one another. It is difficult to be welcoming when we speak through masks and behind plexiglass shields. It is hard to welcome when we cannot be with each other in person.

² <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hospitality> on 6/24/2020

During this time of the pandemic other issues have come to the fore, especially fear and unease, especially if we watch the news too much.

So many of us are afraid. Afraid of getting sick, especially by coming near those who don't live with us. One feeling many have is fear of the "other," of people who are different, in language, in dress, in the way the other might hold themselves in public. Some are afraid of the protests, of financial worries for those among us who lost their jobs.

The bible is full of passages telling us not to be afraid.

(Psalm 23:4) Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will **fear** no evil, for you are with me

[1 John 4:18](#) ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear

(Joshua 1:9) Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

So, just what does welcome look like if we don't gather in person in this time of pandemic?

What could welcome look like?

Too often, we are used to doing the welcoming, of being the hosts, of holding the power. Power? I don't *feel* powerful, and yet....

A couple of years back, several of us attended a conference at Montreat that centered on racism. During one session, we were given a chart to mark how many points we had on the power index. Age, Race, Education, Economics, and more. I had no idea that, according to that metric, only white men of my age group had more power than me. I walk around clueless, not realizing that my take-charge personality is really an embodiment of my power. The thing I learned at that conference is with the power differential, what people like me (who have power) need to be doing is....listening.

As Aaron Burr says in Hamilton, "Talk less, smile more."

Have you ever met a really good listener? The ones who look you in the eye and pay attention to what you are saying? And don't interrupt you when you are talking.

Could a good welcome to those who are "other" from us, be offering a listening ear? For us to pay attention, learn, and really be interested?

This past weekend was the online Poor Peoples Campaign, which 2 million people watched. I watched over 2 hours of it on Saturday evening. It was led by two pastors, Rev.

Dr. William Barber, and the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, a PC(USA) pastor. Stories were shared by people of every race and ethnicity, and from all over the country. The common denominator was they were poor...and unable to break free of the grip poverty placed on their lives. Because poverty permeates everything...education, child care, transportation, health care, clean water and more. It was exhausting, listening to the stories. But what is even more exhausting, is *living* those stories every single day.

I think we are also called to embody that listening with **action**.

Welcome could be listening to and reading the stories of what it really is like to grow up with systemic racism. Be it not getting jobs because of perceived ethnic names, or the red-lining practice limiting where people could buy homes. Growing up in our country, which bears racism from its inception, can lead to very different experiences depending on one's skin color. You may have heard about how every parent of black children has to have "the talk" with their driving age children about what to do when police stop them so they can get home alive. Because police will stop them for "driving while black" at some point. The worry, the burden, these parents carry with them when their babies leave the house? What could welcome look like to our African American brothers and sisters? Could it be **not** clutching our purses closer when we meet a young black man on the street? Could it be joining a march led by the young people of our community and kneeling on the hot pavement for 8 minutes and 46 seconds? Could it be planting a sign in your yard claiming that black lives matter?

We usually fail to welcome people **not** because we want to be unkind, but because we don't know what to say or how to approach them.

In today's gospel, we are told that we are to welcome the *little ones* with a cup of cold water. This phrase, "Little Ones" hearkens to another passage: Matthew 25:40: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters you did it to me.'

Last year our congregation signed up to be a Matthew 25 congregation, one which is working on building up our congregational vitality, while alleviating structural racism and systemic poverty. Matthew 25 calls **all of us** to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive and we wake up to new possibilities.

Faith coming alive? As we offer a cup of cold water and a smile on a hot summer day?

What could faith coming alive in a welcome look like to those who immigrate to our community? Certainly, our ESL program to help new arrivals learn English is gracious way. I wonder if we could welcome our French-speaking brothers and sisters better in their

own language when we do return to worship in person at First Pres. Can we offer a cup of cool, refreshing water, by offering “un tasse d’eau froide” (tass duh fwod)?

I love the way The Message translates our scripture.

Matthew 10:40-42 The Message (MSG)

⁴⁰⁻⁴² “We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God’s messenger. Accepting someone’s help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it. It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won’t lose out on a thing.”

Start small...offer a cup of cool water

Seriously...what can we do? Today? How can we offer even the smallest token of recognizing the humanity in those we meet?

While the Statue of Liberty may have bid welcome to those arriving in New York, the southern border is a very unwelcoming place. The desert in Arizona is a particularly dangerous place, predominantly for those seeking a better life. Many, many people have died in the desert due to the immense heat and lack of water, especially as the global climate changes.

Our congregation supports the border ministry of **Frontera de Cristo** in the sister cities of Agua Prieta, Sonora and Douglas, Arizona. Their goal is to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. And they do this by caring for those crossing our southern border.

Did you know some people who make a practice of leaving water in the desert have been convicted of felony misconduct?

Rev Dan De Leon told of his trip to a Center for Global Education. “We traveled to an indigenous village in Mexico called Amatlán. A man came to speak to us about his experience with crossing the border and working in the United States. His wife sat next to him knitting something while he shared his story. The man, who looked to be in his early 30's, told us about how when his wife became pregnant they had no money and no financial hope for starting their family. So they made the decision for him to go to the U.S. and find work.

He crossed the border with the help of a “coyote” and eventually secured a job, working less than minimum wage so he could send money home. Some three years later he was able to be reunited with his wife and meet his daughter for the first time. After hearing this story, a student in the group, moved by the man's testimony, asked, "How can we help? What can we do to change this?" And he looked at us and said, "Just be nicer. Don't treat us like we're horrible. Be kind."³

Be kind.

Offer a “tasse d’eau froide” (tass duh fwod)

Use the right pronouns.

Genuinely Welcome.

When all is said and done, the only thing that will truly matter is
Did We Love?

It's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice.

Amen

³ https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2003936/hospitality_a_crucial_cup_of_cold_water