

“Radical Hospitality”

July 2, 2017

Text: Matthew 10:40-42

Island Height UMC, Island Heights, NJ

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

*10:40 "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*

*10:41 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;*

*10:42 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 brief passage comes at the end of a section in Matthew's Gospel in which Jesus has been giving instructions to his disciples for going out to spread the good news of the kingdom of heaven. They will heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. And he has been describing the kinds of reactions they will get when they go out in his name. Jesus has not been sugar-coating this mission, and he openly admits he is sending them out like sheep in the midst of wolves.

But, if the disciples are received in any place they go, it will be as if Jesus himself is being received; and in turn, it will be as if God is being received. In a sense, disciples, Jesus seems to be saying, the one you represent is manifested in you, and if you are received and welcomed, there will be rewards.

Welcoming, Welcoming, Welcoming

There's something in the welcoming. The word is stated six times in just two verses. It is clear that Jesus sees welcoming as something good. It's true. We all want to feel welcome wherever we go. Have you ever been somewhere where you just don't feel welcome? Hospitality is what Jesus is pointing to. A new kind of hospitality is what would be called for in the days of Jesus and the original disciples. How else will they be received when they go out to their own people to preach about the one they believe is the Messiah? How will it go when they get to the Gentiles who have nothing to do with their religion at all? It's going to take some radical hospitality for them to be accepted anywhere long enough to share the good news with people groups who prefer to keep to themselves. But Jesus promises rewards to those who do welcome them.

*"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."*

The Prophet and the Righteous One

Welcoming the prophet, and welcoming the righteous One. There's something familiar in those titles. Something that we see at the beginning of the Gospel accounts—the prophet and then the righteous one. John the Baptist, and then Jesus the Christ. The voice crying out in the wilderness, and then the promised One who comes after. The first who baptized in Jordan River, a sacrament we practice to this day; and then

the sinless one who lays down his life, whose body is broken and blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins—a grace from God we remember each time we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. Today we welcome the prophet as we witness the baptism of Marco. And today we welcome the righteous One, Jesus Christ, as we share this Holy meal together.

#### The Little Ones

But who is Jesus sending out? It's the disciples, the little ones, Jesus is sending out. Regular people. Folks like you and me. And Jesus says,

*“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.”*

The work of Christian discipleship is hard, and the road is long. In a parched and weary land, sometimes all you need is a cold cup of water.

But this is not just a message to the disciples who are being sent out by Jesus and how they should be welcomed when they come bringing the good news. Look again carefully and see it is a mirror message. It's not just about how we will be welcomed, but how we will welcome others. Hospitality is a two way transaction. How we show up for others is going matter. So, here's a question: In whose name do you show up?

#### Radical Hospitality

Theologian Emilie Townes puts it this way: “Compassionate welcome means approaching each other through God.” Hold that standard up next to what we see playing out in our world today. We have a lot of work to do.

Yes, I know this may sound pie in the sky optimistic, or even naive. It may sound foolish to propose we extend radical hospitality to someone we perceive as a threat, someone who is altogether different, someone we do not understand. Why extend ourselves to someone who really doesn't deserve it? Because we come in the name of Jesus, who comes in the name of God; and we are slaves to obedience, which leads to righteousness. This is our lot in life. This is our calling. But the good news is that we follow the one who extends himself to everyone who doesn't deserve it. We believe in the one who demonstrates hospitality as the most radical host in all of history.

Now, I didn't call you into this, so don't hold me responsible. If you are here today, it's because the Holy Spirit drew you and God's plan for your life is playing itself out quite nicely. It may be that on the day of Marco Barone's baptism it will be the hour you first believed. For many of you, you have been on this journey a long time, but are still discovering the treasures of faith every day. But for all of us, it is good to remember Jesus's promise of rewards when we welcome another.

I'm not naive. Our challenge today is to live relationally in an alienating world. So, we must consider what it means to be a good host and what it means to be a good guest. We must adopt a willingness to surrender our positions of privilege, whatever they may be, to really receive and welcome another as if we are receiving and welcoming Jesus himself. Amen