

Jeremiah 28:5–9, Psalm 89:1–4, 15–18, Romans 6:12–23, Matthew 10:40–42

God's Hospitality

We have been working our way through Matthew 10 for a couple of weeks:

- Jesus first sends the disciples on a mission that depends on the hospitality of other people;
- He tells them not to be afraid, even in the face of opposition;
- And he points to a new family that goes beyond blood ties.

Today, we reach the end of the chapter, when Jesus sums up the section and talks about rewards ...

“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;

“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.”

We are probably used to thinking that discipleship – following Jesus – is all about us ... what we are to do ... and for good reason:

- Hebrews 13:1 says – Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.
- In Matthew 25:35, Christ the King says – “I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”
- And after this sermon, we will sing the hymn *Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life*, which contains these words:

The cup of water given for thee
still holds the freshness of thy grace;
yet long these multitudes to see
the sweet compassion of thy face.

Yes, we are in the hospitality business ... but ... that's not the whole story ... we – the church – are on a mission that will change us as much as it changes the people we meet ...

- We must accept the welcome of others before we can share the good news ... and that's good news!
- In a way, this is harder than the way we usually think about it, because we are not in control of the encounter ...

You've probably heard Pastor Ray make reference to something that *Presbyterian Outlook* editor Rev. Jill Duffield has written in her weekly email message to preachers. This week, she says this about our Gospel text:

“Almost 17 years ago my husband went on a mission trip to Guatemala. The trip was not one where the group of youth and adults painted buildings or taught Bible studies. The mission they were on was to listen, to learn, to begin to make relationships.

The experiences were transformative, at least for my husband.

He said, “I had the best meal of my life there.” “Really?” I asked. “What was it?” “A bowl of black beans and hardboiled egg.” He was effusive about this meal.

He said they'd eaten at some restaurants and had beans and rice at virtually every meal, but this meal was special. The bowls of beans and hardboiled eggs had been served to them by a woman in her home. She had opened her home to this group of Americans she'd never met before and offered them her very best.

There was little that her family and these Presbyterians had in common, but they were united together in Christ and she therefore saw them as her brothers and her sisters. She did not share out of abundance. Her home was not well appointed or spacious. The food was simple, but the welcome and the generosity was unlike anything my husband had ever experienced. To this day if you ask him what the best meal he has ever eaten was, he will say, “A bowl of black beans and a hardboiled egg.”

I would say that ... Jesus is telling us, “Take your love for family, that love for closest community, and extend it ... extend it further and further still.

- Welcome the stranger ...
- Welcome the one whose life you do not understand ... not to change them, but simply because they too are God's.
- And let the stranger welcome you.
- Let the one whose life you do not understand welcome you, so that they might experience blessings ... and you will be changed.

This Gospel lesson is about God's Hospitality Index ... which asks if our hospitality is narrow or wide ...

- Whether we see ourselves as the gatekeepers to the kingdom or the welcoming committee of the kingdom;
- And whether we can also see ourselves as "little ones" in need of a cup water, or a bowl of black beans and a hard-boiled egg shared in Jesus's name.

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.

Revelation 7:12