

Ministry of Welcome
Meditation on Matthew 10:40-42
July 2, 2017
Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

40 “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 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; 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.”

I just started following a new blog; it’s called “Petals from the Basket,” by Brenda Strohbehn Henderson. Brenda isn’t a famous speaker and writer. She is an ordinary person who lives in Indiana and seeks to share her hope in Jesus with the world. She has written a number of books, including several collections of her devotions from her blog.

One of her posts begins with the intriguing title, “Why You Should Never Welcome Missionaries Into Your Home.” In it, she says that she and her husband, Joe, eagerly signed up to be hosts when her church sought homes for missionaries coming for a conference. They offered both of their guest rooms. “Big mistake,” she says. “BIG mistake....”

Though she grew up in a home where missionaries and pastors often stayed, as Brenda and her husband pulled out of their driveway, headed for the final day of the conference, Brenda had tears streaming down her cheeks. She said to Joe, “‘We’re never hosting missionaries again.’ He readily agreed.” Brenda goes on to say that because she cares about us -- her “sweet faith friends”--she feels it is only fair to warn us why we should never welcome missionaries into our homes.

Here are her reasons:

- 1. “They broaden your burden for lost souls.”** “My ‘mission field’ may not be in England or Africa,” she says, “but the dedication of our guests to fulfill God’s command to share the glorious gospel of Christ...was a rebuke to me to have that same driving desire to see my community, my city, my state, my nation hear the good news of salvation. Their fervor, zeal, determination and willingness to forego earthly comfort and pleasures pricked my heart’s natural tendency to put things, schedules, and personal needs before the eternal souls of those around me. My heart was stirred. My affections were refocused. My burden was renewed.”
- 2. “They lengthen your already-long prayer list.”** Oh, how I wish we could give full financial support to each missionary we come into contact with. It would be awesome to write a ginormous check and rapidly get them to the region to which God has burdened them to go. But in most cases, He will allow us to give toward their work through the gifts of our prayers....My prayer list grew a little longer this week,” she says. “My greatest prayer is that the God who hears and answers these prayers will draw others to Himself through the work of the

missionaries I came to know and love while they were in our home.”

3. **“They take a piece of your heart with them when they leave.”** “I cried tears of love, joy and gratitude,” Brenda says, “when the missionary couples drove away, feeling as if I were sending my “children” off to face an uncertain but blessed future, and my heart was touched...Through our evening times of fellowship around chocolate chip cookies and milk and our breakfasts of coffee cake and scrambled eggs, we shared not only food and laughter; we shared a bond in Christ that wove its way into our hearts...”

Jesus also talks about benefits for those who “welcome” those he sends out to minister in his name in our gospel reading today. With “welcome,” Christ means those who offer food, shelter and other support. These few verses in Matthew bring to a close a long passage of instructions to his followers stretching the length of chapter 10. The prologue to the commission begins in 9:35, as Jesus shows the disciples what ministry *is*. He travels about “all the cities and villages, teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and sickness.” His ministry is stirred by the heart and not done with some sense of duty or obligation, just as the disciples’ should be led by love and a desire to help. In 9:36, Jesus sees the crowds and has “compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” He asks his followers, before he sends them out, to pray for more missionaries. “The harvest is plentiful,” he

says in 9:37, “but the laborers are few;” “Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest (pray!) to send out laborers into his harvest.”

At the beginning of ch. 10, Jesus summons his 12 and gives them his authority--the power that God has given Him--to cast out unclean spirits and cure sickness and disease. They may take little else with them on this journey. No gold, silver or copper -- no money! No bag, extra clothing or shoes. They are to go out to the villages and stay in homes of those they find “worthy.” The disciples must rely on the hospitality of strangers. “If it (the household) is not worthy, let your peace return to you,” Jesus says in 10:13-14. “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.”

Those who respond to the disciples or his “little ones,” as Jesus calls them, are in effect responding to Christ himself, not just because they are his representatives and ambassadors, but because he is one of them and will always be with them, as he says at the end of Matthew. After warning of the persecution they will suffer because of him, Jesus assures them that they will find people who will be kind to them and places of refuge as they seek to follow in his loving ways.

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,” Jesus says, “and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” He continues on this theme in Matthew 25:35-40, when he tells them, “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it

that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

When Jesus talks about welcoming a "prophet" and receiving "a prophet's reward" and welcoming a righteous person and receiving "the reward of the righteous," he is still talking about his disciples. He will again call them "prophets" in 23:34, when he warns the scribes and Pharisees of "woes" to come and the suffering of his followers.

"Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town." He calls his disciples "prophets" in the Sermon on the Mount, when he also speaks of "reward," a recurring theme in this gospel. Jesus says in 5:12, after telling them they are blessed when they are persecuted and others say evil things about them: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

But what does Jesus mean by "reward"? Well, he isn't talking about earning our way into heaven. Salvation is a gracious gift from God received by faith. Jesus is talking about the blessings of being in a loving relationship with God. Have you noticed that the more you serve and give, the more your relationship with the Lord and God's people grows? This is the treasure in heaven of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and

rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there *your heart* will be also.”

Serving Christ’s disciples--the “little ones” and “least of these”-- wouldn’t necessarily require much wealth or effort. It could be as simple as offering a “cup of cold water,” so precious in the climate in which Jesus lives.

When Jesus mentions the “cup of cold water,” are you thinking what I am thinking? I am remembering when Jesus is hot and tired in John 4 and he stops at Jacob’s well in the middle of the day. Who comes along, but a Samaritan woman, all by herself? He asks her for a cup of water-- and she receives much more than she gives--“living water,” in which she would “never thirst again.” Then she becomes a missionary for Christ in a dry and thirsty land.

Many of you have opened your homes to missionaries and pastors, including Jim and me. You have opened your homes to one another. Shared meals, laughter and tears. Keep on doing the good works the Lord leads you to do--visit the sick and lonely, those living in poverty and those in prison, those who feel the Lord has forgotten them. Those who don’t know the Lord’s love and mercy! Give food and clothing to the needy. Send cards and emails to encourage those who are struggling or suffering. Give a smile, a hug, a kiss to a fellow laborer for God’s harvest. You will be blessed when you do!

And when you feel down and wonder how God could possibly use you because of the life situation you find yourself in, remember that what you have to give or what you can do is never too small to mean a great deal to someone else. And you can ALWAYS pray!

Remember: every act of kindness is like a cup of cold water in a dry and thirsty land.

Let us pray. Thank you, Lord, for your great kindness to us, for forgiving us for all of our sins through your Son's suffering work on a cross. Move our hearts to compassion, Lord, for people in need so that we respond to Christ's call to go out and share your gospel through acts of kindness and love. Teach us, Lord, to pray for one another and encourage each other daily. Lead us to give generously of ourselves and our resources to strengthen our ministry to the community and world. Raise up missionaries in our midst, those who are bold enough to leave our comfort zones and take your hope beyond our borders. May we desire to help the stranger and Christians who are struggling and suffering in countries where Christianity is illegal and your followers fear for their lives. Empower us to reach out to missionaries around the globe-- particularly those who serve in our denomination--and offer them kindnesses that are to them as cups of cold water in a dry and thirsty land. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.