

A Cup of Cold Water
Matthew 10:40-42
Plymouth Congregational Church, UCC
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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.”

There are some commercials running on TV these days that intrigue me. They are commercials for a credit card program that purportedly says what it does and does what it says. They wonder what it would be like to say exactly what you are thinking to people

In the latest version that I’ve seen a woman goes up to a front door carrying a pie and rings the doorbell. You immediately think she is welcoming a new neighbor. The woman in the house answers the door. The woman with the pie says: “Hi, I’m your neighbor. I know you are new to the neighborhood and brought you this pie to see how weird you might be.” The second woman says, brightly, “Oh, well it smells...(pause)” The first woman, “Intrusive?” The second woman, “Yes! Would you like to come in and snoop around?” First woman “Why yes! That’s exactly why I came.”

The voice over asks, “Wouldn’t life be easier if we just said what we were thinking?” Would it? Maybe yes, Maybe no!

As I read our words from Matthew about welcome I thought about these commercials and our culture of plain speech. Which isn’t always so plain or so simple. Or is sometimes so plain that it is hurtful and divisive. Or is so plain that it hides the truth in plain sight.

And we all know that the old adage, “Stick and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” is profoundly false. Words do hurt...they can burn and wound and leave a mark on our souls. AND they can be like a cup of cold water after a hard day’s work. Or on the lips of someone dying from thirst. They can be like springs bubbling up in the desert. Water is essential to life...so are words of kindness, compassion, love....words of strength and truth and justice proclaimed without malice or hatred.

I also thought about our sincere efforts here at Plymouth to offer extravagant and even radical welcome to people who walk through our doors. We do a pretty good job with our words and in our actions. We believe fervently and remind one another frequently that welcoming the stranger is welcoming the Holy among us.

The Greek word, *dechomai*, translated as “welcome” in our passage today using the NRSV can also be translated “receive.” I think receive can take the action of welcome deeper. Does receive open the door to relationship? I can welcome you at

my front door but not receive your presence into my house. Even the woman in the commercial surprised by the nosy neighbor with the pie receives the woman into her house. You wonder if no matter how awkward their beginning, there is still a possibility for relationship. According to the dictionary, to welcome is "to greet gladly." To receive is "to accept, to take in" as well as to welcome. A truly meaningful welcome to someone needs both actions.

The words we heard about welcome from the gospel of Matthew come at the end of a long discourse of instruction that Jesus gives the 12 disciples as he sends them out as missionaries to preach and teach all Jesus has been teaching them. And to be agents of healing in the world. "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ... 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." Because we are attuned to the story of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 we first assume that the "little ones" are the "least of these" in our world. Or maybe you thought about the children in Matthew 19 that the disciples are shooing away. Jesus says to them and to us that we must become open and receptive like the children to enter the kingdom of heaven. However the "little ones" in this passage are not the least of these or the children. They are the disciples...the ones sent on mission proclaiming God's good news, the ones healing and bringing new life. The little ones are the disciples sent out to do the work of God's kingdom...they are us.

Jesus wanted the disciples to be received! Not just glad-handed..."Oh, hi! How are you? Glad to have you here!" ... Next... Greeted gladly, yes AND received! A reception that is like taking in a cup of cold water to restore life...to keep it thriving! When the disciples are greeted and fully with life-giving welcome, Jesus said that it was like receiving him which was like receiving the one who sent him....receiving God. Greeting and receiving with a "cup of cold water" welcome is receiving God in our midst....It goes way beyond just being nice, polite people.

So this poses some questions in my mind....Starting from the inside and moving out... How do you greet and receive your self as one of Christ's beloved disciples? If your self-talk is anything like mine....it is not always so generous. I once said something self-deprecating in a conversation with my son and he said to me, "Don't talk about my mother that way!" I believe God is often saying to us..."Don't talk about my beloved _____ that way!" We are not perfect and God knows that. But God is always ready to receive us with that cup of cold water welcome.

How do we talk to those closest to us....our family and friends? Do we see them first as God's beloved disciples even when we are frustrated with them? And maybe for good reason! How do we have conflict with them and still see them as God's beloveds? And welcome them as such in the good times and the not so good?

How do we welcome one another in this community as disciples of Christ as we go about building the realm of God here in northern CO? How we use our words and our actions to greet and receive one another has everything to do with how we receive our guests! Are we willing to step outside our comfort zone to welcome those we do not know but who may have been members and friends of this

congregation for years? Or may be new? Or may be a very different age from us? Or may disagree with us on some issue? How do we use this deep sense of welcome to work across the silos of boards and committees and competing mission initiatives within this very community?

And moving out one more circle....I have often noted that it is easier for us as Progressive Christians to have interfaith dialogue than it is to speak across the divisions of Christendom....than to speak to our more conservative and evangelical brothers and sisters. It sounds more exciting too, doesn't it? More exotic. More difficult somehow. Yet it is harder to speak with family members that are estranged. How sad that we cannot speak to our own family members and welcome them. And that they may shy away from being welcomed by us. And vice versa. This is part of my excitement about the IAF community organizing work...it is an opportunity to learn relationship, to reach across the conservative/liberal boundaries and work with Christian brothers and sister on issues that can change lives.

In an interview with Krista Tippett on her radio show, "On Being", American poet, Marie Howe quotes one of her poetry professors, the exiled Russian poet, Joseph Brodsky: "You Americans, you are so naïve. You think evil is going to come into your houses wearing big black boots. It doesn't come like that. Look at the language. It begins in the language."

Friends, we all know in this day of highly inflamed language, how much words as well as actions shape who we are. Marie Howe goes on to say to Krista Tippett... "language is almost all we have left of action in the modern world. ... action has become what we say. The moral life is lived out in what we say more often than what we do."

Let the Spirit of God work in words of deep welcome from the inside out in you....gladly greet and receive yourself as a beloved disciple of God's realm, gladly greet and receive those you are closest to, those in this community that you love and work with and those you do not yet know, those who enter our doors as guests....and those whom you meet when you leave the doors of this sanctuary to bring God's good news and healing into the world. Your words will inform your actions and your actions your words! You will say what you mean to others and what you say will be compassionate, just and loving. You will be a cup of cold water for this thirsty world! Amen.

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