

June 28th Sermon: “A Cup of Cold Water for an Uncomfortable Gospel”

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Most of us are glad to welcome people who are easy to love. But the Gospel today pushes us further: can we welcome Christ when he comes to us in ways that unsettle us? In the stranger, in the burdened disciple, in the prophet who speaks an uncomfortable word, in the person we would rather avoid - can we welcome Christ there?

We know that the Gospel brings good news. The question now is to whom Christ brings the good news, and whether it is good news for everyone. Who welcomes the good news, and to whom is it bad news? Today, we are going to focus on what it means to give a compassionate welcome, especially when we encounter Christ through listening to the word of God and through his messengers, and how radical hospitality could be seen as a form of service to Christ.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus says that to welcome his messengers is to welcome him. That means Christian hospitality is not just about being nice, open, or socially warm. It is about receiving Christ's presence, even when Christ comes through people, words, or situations that unsettle us. Sometimes God's messengers do not bring immediate comfort. Sometimes grace arrives as correction. Sometimes good news sounds uncomfortable before it becomes

liberating. That is exactly where Matthew 10 becomes sharp. Jesus is not merely praising general kindness; he is teaching that the way we receive his sent ones reveals whether we are truly willing to receive him. Christian hospitality, therefore, is not merely kindness to the agreeable, but openness to Christ wherever he comes - even in inconvenient people, uncomfortable truth, and costly discipleship.

The Gospel today sounds simple at first: welcome the messenger, offer a cup of cold water, and then receive the reward. It sounds like a lesson in kindness. But who is that messenger, and what does he want to convey? That is where the Gospel becomes searching. It is one thing to welcome Christ when he comes in beauty, comfort, and reassurance. It is another to welcome Christ when he comes in the form of interruption, challenge, inconvenience, or correction. Yet Jesus identifies himself precisely with those he sends. To receive them is to receive him.

This is why Christian hospitality is more than politeness. It is more than having an open door, a warm smile, or good manners after worship. Those things matter, of course. But the hospitality Jesus speaks of is a hospitality of the heart. It is a willingness to receive Christ on Christ's terms, not only on our own.

That is where the other readings help us. In Jeremiah, the people face competing voices. Hananiah was a false prophet. He opposed Prophet Jeremiah of Judah. The confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah took place at the temple in

Jerusalem. They met in the presence of the priests, and all people gathered at the temple. Prophet Jeremiah was wearing a wooden yoke on his neck as a physical symbol of mandatory submission to Babylon. Judah was facing imminent Babylonian dominance. God had commanded Jeremiah to tell the people of Judah to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of Babylon. Hananiah represented a faction of popular prophets who preached peace and rebellion against Babylon, telling the people what they wanted to hear. Hananiah approached the prophet Jeremiah to publicly break this message of doom with a comforting yet false prophecy of immediate peace. Hananiah publicly contradicted God's warnings by falsely claiming that Babylon's yoke would be broken within two years. Jeremiah, with all sarcasm, responded, saying, "Amen! May the Lord do so!" by showing he also wished for peace. However, Jeremiah reminded the crowd of historical precedent: true prophets of old usually prophesied war, disaster, and plague. He gave the ultimate test of a true prophet. Hananiah physically broke the wooden yoke off Jeremiah's neck. God then commanded Jeremiah to declare that the wooden yoke would be replaced with an unbreakable yoke of iron.

Hananiah speaks the reassuring word, the word everyone wants to hear. Jeremiah speaks the harder word, the word that unsettles false confidence. The painful truth running through Scripture is that God's people do not always

welcome God's true messenger. Sometimes we prefer the voice that comforts us in our illusions over the voice that calls us to repentance and trust.

That pattern has not disappeared. We still prefer the manageable word, the flattering word, the word that leaves us unchanged. We welcome what confirms us and resist what converts us. We are often quite happy to receive encouragement, but less eager to receive admonition; happy to receive blessing, but not transformation; happy to receive Christ as comforter, but not Christ as Lord.

And this is where St Paul speaks with such force in Romans. Paul tells us that what looks like freedom is often slavery. When we insist on having life on our own terms, when we resist God because we think surrender will diminish us, we are not becoming free - we are becoming captive. Sin teaches us to treat God's will as a threat. Grace teaches us that God's will is the path into life.

That is why welcoming Christ can feel difficult. Christ comes not only to console us but to reclaim us. He comes not only to affirm us but to sanctify us. He comes to free us from the little tyrannies of pride, resentment, self-righteousness, and control. And often he does that through people we would not have chosen, through words we did not want to hear, through needs we would rather avoid, and through disruptions to our settled life.

Jesus makes this concrete in a strikingly small image: a cup of cold water. Not a heroic act. Not a grand public gesture. But just through a simple act of welcome and support. The point is that discipleship is often tested in ordinary responses. Do we make room for the one who is carrying a burden? Do we support the one who is serving faithfully? Do we dismiss the inconvenient person? Do we harden ourselves against the one whose presence asks something of us?

The Lord who asks us to welcome him in his messengers is not trying to burden us, but to free us. What we resist may be the very grace we need. And the smallest act of welcome - even a cup of cold water - may show that our hearts are learning to receive not only one another, but Christ himself. Amen.