

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Jesus has been talking about finding one's life in losing one's life for his sake, he's talked about disciples taking up the cross and following him, a one-way journey.

Now he states that "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." Jesus sent by God the Father, sends us. He sent me. He sent me here. Yes, you as a congregation called me, but the call to pastoral ministry comes from God as well as from people.

Jesus goes on to talk about welcoming a prophet. Prophets in olden times were often rejected by those who heard them, but there were exceptions when a hearer welcomed the prophet. Such a person who welcomes a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, whatever God gives the prophet for faithful service.

Similarly, one will receive a righteous person's reward when welcoming a righteous person. All these, welcoming the one sent by Jesus, welcoming a prophet, welcoming a righteous person, mean that servants of God, disciples following Jesus, are able to perceive God working in others, and they respond to it.

Which leads me to "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."

Jesus talks about a small gift, a cup of cold water, to a little one because that little one is a disciple. The little one may be a child, it may be someone who society, our secular world, regards as insignificant. The unemployed, the unemployable, the homeless, those who are simply down on their luck, those who are marginalized by others.

Let me share a true story with you, it's the story of a guy named Roger, a real man, an Air Force veteran, who retired from the service and began attending our church back in California. Roger became a Stephen Minister. Stephen Ministry is similar in many respects to our Befrienders Ministry here at Trinity. I was also a Stephen Minister, and a Stephen Leader so I became quite aware of this story.

My wife Cynthia who headed Stephen Ministry at our church received a call from Stephen Ministry headquarters in St. Louis. Now this was back in the 90s and they had a man dying from AIDS, who desired a Stephen Minister. He was some distance away, and all the churches in the area had refused to help him. AIDS of course had a great stigma to it, and not a whole lot was known about it.

Cynthia told St. Louis our church would send a Stephen Minister. She went and met with the man, and thought Roger was the right fit. She approached Roger, told him of the man, that he was dying from AIDS, and desired a Stephen Minister and Roger immediately said he would do it. Roger recounted this in a peer supervision meeting a couple weeks later.

Roger went to see the man, listened to him, saw that he was agitated, heard him say that his feet were bothering him, heard him ask if Roger would rub his feet. Roger rubbed the man's feet, and continued to minister to him until he died. By his concern, his love for the dying man, by his rubbing the man's feet and his faithful ministry to the man, walking with him to the door that Roger couldn't enter because he is still among the living, by all this, Roger gave this man, this man who was ostracized because of the disease he had, a cup of cold water. Roger's witness to his faith had an impact on the man's family, a positive impact.

Now I don't know what Roger's reward will be on that day when he goes through that door himself, but I know that Roger exemplified what Jesus is talking about, giving a cup of cold water to a little one. Roger is a man who welcomes Jesus, who welcomes He who sent Jesus, Roger is a man who humbly walks with our God. Roger is a friend of mine, he is also an inspiration to me by his loving and humble witness and his unfailing good humor.

Let us pray for those sent by Jesus and for those who receive those sent by Jesus.

Precious Lord, thank you for the gifts you give, the gift of receiving you and those you send, the gift of humbly going in your name to give a cup of cold water to those little ones in the name of a disciple.

AMEN