

“Giving in the Name of Jesus”

Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
February 8, 2015

New Testament Lesson: Matthew 10:40-42

Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 10:17-19

An ancient rabbi once asked his students how they could tell when the night had ended and the day was on its way back. “Could it be,” asked one student, “when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?” “No,” answered the Rabbi. “Could it be,” inquired another, “when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it is a fig tree or a peach tree?” “No,” the Rabbi replied. “Well, then, what is it?” his students demanded. The wise old teacher responded with words of immense wisdom:

“It is when you look on the face of any woman or man and see that she or he is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is, it is still night.”

Such wisdom reflects Jesus’ teaching about embracing others as brothers and sisters. And in today’s New Testament lesson, Jesus takes this much further. He is sending the 12 disciples throughout the countryside to minister on his behalf.

He has already given them the power to cure and to raise up and to cleanse those in need, at the beginning of Chapter 10. And he wants them to know where they stand in all of this, that they stand alongside him in whatever they do. “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,” says Jesus, “and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

Wow, the disciples are equated with Jesus, and in that, with God. That’s a pretty big responsibility. But if you think about it, we as followers of Jesus, are called to be *his hands and feet in this world, to minister on his behalf*. God sent Jesus into the world to bring us closer to God and unite us in ministry, in giving in the name of Christ. We are sent into the world with the power to cure, raise up, and cleanse those in need just like Jesus did, just like his earliest disciples.

And we do this. Our church members volunteer in hospitals, give to Ronald McDonald House, and support all sorts of agencies striving to cure diseases such a cancer and diabetes.

We give a hand up to those trying to stay afloat or get ahead in life, through such programs as Habitat for Humanity, the Community Services League, Drumm Farm, Mother’s Refuge, and Hillcrest Ministries which is being collected for this month. And we strip away barriers to those seeking to know and experience the love and fellowship of God, through such offerings as GenOn, our community All-Church dinners, and even yesterday’s Chocolate Festival.

Chocolate is good for what ails you, and chocolate from the church is best of all.

So you see, we too are sent out to cure, raise up and welcome our brothers and sisters in this community and beyond. That is what it is to give in the name of Christ. And for the most part, it makes us feel good. But in addition to the good feelings we get, Jesus warns us that there are dangers and struggles in giving as he gives.

When he says, "Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward," just what type of reward do you imagine He's talking about? How well were the prophets of God received, people like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel? Think about it, those of you here who have read about the prophets? They weren't received very well at all, were they?

The prophet's reward was often to be ignored, humiliated and rejected. God's word is not easy for some people to accept. And yet those who reject the word of the Lord are just the ones God wants to reach the most – the lost sheep, if you will.

So we can't expect that doing ministry here in Independence is going to be any easier than it was for the disciples of Jesus or the prophets of God. But the good news is, that if we stay true to our calling as disciples, as followers of Jesus, our efforts will bare fruit and be rewarded. Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous."

The reward of the righteous is *greater justice in an unjust world*. The hard part is, this comes in God's time, not ours. If we truly want to be acting rightly in the eyes of God, we have to have faith in God to overcome injustices. Otherwise, we run the risk of crossing the line, apart from what God would want or how God would work things out in the end. That's why as a nation, we seek to act alongside other nations in the face of horrific injustices such as genocide. And that's why as individuals, we have to be careful not to loose sight of our faith in God to make things right.

Imagine you were in school and saw someone being bullied, or at work with a coworker being mistreated, or here at church with someone being overlooked. The right thing to do is to help the other person. But there are a lot of ways to be of help. What are some ways you could be of help to someone being bullied or mistreated? Anybody

You could tell your teacher or your boss or your pastor, right? What's another way you could help someone at school or work or church? You could go to the one causing trouble and put a stop to it! Any other ideas? How about being a listening ear or offering an encouraging word for the person in need. These are all perfectly reasonable ways of responding. But not all of these ways will always be the right way to respond.

We can't expect that what we're doing in the name of Christ is actually the right thing in the eyes of God unless we are very careful to not trample on God's righteousness in the process, God's divine justice. So how do we participate in God's divine justice?

Well that's where the final example from today's reading comes in, where Jesus says, "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."

That's quite an assurance. Jesus is saying that if we help out one another even with something as simple as a cup of cold water, our reward is guaranteed, God will see that things are put right. In other words, it's the little people doing the little things that make a big difference in this world.

The late Jesuit priest *Anthony De Mello* told about a man who traveled across land and sea to see for himself the Master's extraordinary fame. "What miracles has your Master worked?" he asked a disciple. "Well, there are miracles and miracles. In your land it is regarded as a miracle if God does someone's will. In our country it is regarded as a miracle if someone does the will of God."¹ In other words, when we do God's will by giving of ourselves in the name in Christ, miracles happen. The will of God is not and never will be solely up to the powerful and mighty of this world. *God's miracles start with us as individuals.*

God's will, if it's to be done at all, must be done by the many little ones like you and me, who go about the day giving simple blessings by doing acts of kindness in the name of our Lord and Savior.

There are three things to take away from today's sermon. First, giving in the name of Christ means being the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing healing, justice, and Christian love to a hurting world.

Second, we can't expect that our efforts will be easy. Like the prophets of old entrusted with God's word of justice and peace, we will face opposition, the world will push back, ignoring us and rejecting us and what we have to offer. That's no reason to be discouraged.

Because, thirdly, if we continue to do what we can in the spirit of Him who sent us, God will use even us to bring healing, justice and peace to the world, one cold cup of water at a time. Amen.

¹ Anthony De Mello, *Anthony De Mello: Writings* (Orbis, 1999).

PASTORAL PRAYER

Most loving God, we thank you for this time together, this sacred space of prayer.

We thank you that you are always present to us, to guide and to strengthen us, especially when we are uncertain and lonely.

We pray for those who feel abandoned and isolated, and therefore feel as though they have been left behind while everyone else continues on their way.

May all for whom we pray feel surrounded by your love through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Keep us mindful of Jesus who walked this earth as we do, who also felt loneliness and betrayal but who triumphed over all adversity and lives forever as our sure foundation, the very ground of our being.

Help us to remember all this, just as surely as we remember your words to us, and particularly the words of the prayer that you taught us, the prayer that we raise to you now in song.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive
our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**