

A CUP OF COLD WATER

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Text: Matthew 10:40-42

SCRIPTURE

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40 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever 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; ⁴²and 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.'

SERMON

I don't know about you but when it comes to drinking water I am rather picky. To tell you the truth I would prefer to have a Diet Coke. But when I do drink water, it has to be cold. In fact, I have recently discovered the joy of having a Yeti mug which keeps things really cold for a really long time. We Westerners don't care much for lukewarm water. And in today's text, even Jesus stresses the importance of cold water.

Jesus says, "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." A cup of cold water — such as the one sitting beside the pulpit here — seems like such a little thing. We can get cold water whenever we want. At home, it's as easy as taking ice cubes from the freezer and filling up a glass. At work or school, we have refrigerated water fountains and water coolers are everywhere. Sit down in a restaurant, and a glass of cold water just magically appears. It's the one beverage you don't have to pay for — and often don't even have to ask for.

But Jesus didn't have to add that word. He could just as easily have said "a cup of water." But instead he specified "*cold* water."

In that time drinking cold water was a rare pleasure. It didn't happen all that often, and when it did, it tasted so good! Drinking cold water meant that someone went to a lot of trouble for you. Of course there was no running water or refrigeration so the household's water supply came from the village well. It started out cool in the early morning when someone — usually one of the women or girls — walked down there with a clay jar, filled it, and came staggering back with it balanced on her head. She would set the heavy clay jar in a shady space inside the house. But as

the hours went by, it lost that cool, crisp, fresh-from-the-well taste. By late afternoon — the time most thirsty dinner guests were likely to arrive — you were lucky if room-temperature water was what you had left. So if someone brings a cup of cold water to one of "these little ones," it means she gets up, runs to the well and comes back with fresh, cool water. A special trip, a special effort, for honored guests. Today's refrigerated water supply from an office water cooler or drinking fountain is plentiful. So most of us take it for granted. But in this context, this is no small thing.¹

These last verses here wrap up chapter 10 and concludes what is called Jesus' Missionary Discourse. They are Jesus' parting instructions to his disciples just before they go out and preach the good news and heal the sick. If you've ever left home on a major undertaking — going off to college, enlisting in the military or moving halfway across the country to take up a new job — you may have been given a few parting instructions that sound an awful lot like your mother's voice. You know how it goes:

"Make sure you don't go out of the house in the winter without a hat and a scarf."

"Never mix whites and colors in the washing machine."

"Don't give in to peer pressure."

"Always wear clean underwear, in case you end up in the emergency room."

Jesus' advice to his disciples is of a different order. They were warned that as they went forward "as sheep to the wolves" — they would encounter people hostile to the gospel. They were instructed not to take anything with them, no silver or gold, to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, to spread God's peace, to shake the dust off their sandals in places where they were not received, and to teach a hard word — saying — love God above all other loves, and the way of life is found in losing your life for others. With these and similar words of wisdom, Jesus equips his disciples for their bold, risky and momentous journey. A journey where they will go out and share the greatest gift in the world, the good news of salvation. And they'll offer that gift for free. So our lesson this morning picks up at the end of his instructions. And in it Jesus tells them that, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." Jesus is talking about hospitality here. And he doesn't attach any strings or qualify who deserves hospitality and who does not. Instead, he tells them to go the extra mile, make a special effort, to treat them as honored guests...the little ones included.

We run into a dead end when we try to be the ones to decide who deserves our welcome, who deserves that cup of cold water, or who deserves affordable health care, or a living wage, or an education. Our calling is to simply extend the welcome and plant seeds of goodness and let God do the rest. In welcoming others, we also welcome God. And that welcome includes making sure that there is enough cold water to go around.

¹ Homiletics Magazine. July/August 2017. Volume 29, Number 4

In the 1960s, the Kingston Trio released a song called "Desert Pete." The ballad tells of a thirsty cowboy, crossing the desert, and finds a hand pump. Next to it, Desert Pete has left a note with instructions on how best to use it. The note reads:

"Dear Friend,

This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer in it and it should last for at least five years. But the washer dries out and the pump has to be primed. So under the white rock to the north I've buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and corked up.

There's enough water in the bottle to prime the pump, but not if you take a drink first.

Pour about one-fourth of the water and let it soak the leather washer. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You'll get water. This well has never run dry.

Have some faith. Then, when you've pumped all the water you need, fill the bottle and put it back where you found it for the next feller who travels this path.

Signed, "Desert Pete"

In the song, the cowboy resists the temptation to drink and uses the water as the note instructs. In reward for his obedience, he receives an abundance of cold, satisfying water. Had he not acted in faith, he would have had only a jar of unsatisfying warm water to drink and there would have been no way for the next thirsty traveler to get a drink.

We are placed on this earth by a loving, merciful God who created us and cautioned us to prime the pump - to have a little faith so that all are given what they need. And we are left with instructions just as Dessert Pete did for the finders of that old pump, that we are to be a welcoming community, offering hospitality to others, for in doing so we welcome God. That is our reward.

We practice that hospitality every time our Food Pantry and Helping Hands store is open, every time we make or give out a lunch to a hungry child, every time we fill a backpack, every blanket that is made and prayer shawl given. And we practice it here when we gather at the table where all are welcome. Here, there is always more in the cup and enough bread to go around.

Our Lord is teaching us that living a faithful and complete life is all about those trips down to the well to fetch a cup of cold water, not for ourselves, but to give to somebody else.

We are all alike in our thirst. We are all alike in our need. And the only person who can quench that thirst is the one who offers not just ordinary water, but crisp, cold, water, refreshing...Living Water forevermore.