



“Our Reward”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Matthew 10:40-42

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."

Sermon:

(Sometimes a minister wakes up in the morning, and throws out a sermon. It's scary, but it happens. Happened to me this morning.)

There's a certain comfort in exegesis, in critically studying a text and discerning what the authors intended, what they were saying, what they meant, in context to their time, culture and language. So, for example...

The "little ones" of this text are not children. They are not even the poor and the powerless in that moment in time of imperial Roman oppression.

They are, scholars are pretty certain, the traveling evangelists, the first missionaries, of the Jesus movement. They took the stories of Jesus with them from place to place, encouraging house churches, sharing letters and teachings, healing and serving.

They were the “prophets” who preached of Jesus the Nazarene, to the first believers. They were the traveling disciples, who needed a cup of cold water and a meal and a place to stay. Every church in the world has its own missionaries, its own traveling evangelists. For hundreds of years, they went out and shared the stories of Jesus around the world. There are Christians now in every continent, and almost every nation.

Is today’s text calling on us to support our missionaries in East Timor, Tom and Monica Liddle? They do deeply important work of compassionate service providing medical aid and hospice care among the poor and oppressed of East Timor. Is it my call to speak to you of them today? Is that what I am called to preach? Perhaps. But perhaps today, we needn’t look so far away.

Maybe, just maybe, at this time in our nation, our evangelists are right here, at our door. Maybe, just maybe, they are knocking on the doors of our hearts with a message from Jesus...

- Telling us, violence against black and brown skinned people is a sin.
- Urging us to look honestly into the depths of our white privilege and into the depths of hate and distrust of the non-white people, in this nation.
- Asking us, in the name of Jesus, to break it down, and build anew, build differently, with love and justice for all.
- Urging us, with a prophet’s voice, to remember that Black Lives Matter, and that every person should be able to breathe.
- Every person should be able to walk down a street, drive a car, go for a jog...without the danger of being shot simply because they are there, and their skin is brown, or black.

Perhaps, it is to these “prophets” that we must listen.

It is to these “little ones” that we must give a cup of cold water.

And in so doing, we will reap our reward.

Our reward? Our reward is to live in and serve the inclusive, generous, loving vision of our Creator God.

The vision of God that Jesus offered us through his life and witness: healing, and feeding, and community making. Welcome, and comfort, justice for the oppressed, love for all; even the ones who scorned and derided it!

Our reward? It is to live in a different world, to build a different world, to envision a different world for our children and grandchildren, all the children of the world.

The world that God envisions, one step at a time.

A world of enough, and shared for all. A world of living plants, animals, ecosystems.

A world of relieving suffering, and yes, eliminating it!

As we discern what Jesus is calling us to do...we receive our reward.

We become a church of welcome. We become a people who actively dismantle racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and prejudice in ourselves and in our world.

Offering a cup of water every time.

I don't believe that all the "prophets, missionaries, evangelists, disciples" are out there somewhere far away. They may indeed, be very near.

So, let us receive them wherever they are. Sometimes they are on the street, behind a megaphone, in front of a banner...pushing hard to change the world. They come from our high schools that have been the scenes of massacres. They are black and brown and white opening our eyes to violence and bigotry. They come to speak up about saving the lives of girls, and saving the planet.

Malala, and Greta...let us give them a cup of cold water.

And for the marchers, a cup of cold water.

Let us acknowledge, sometimes we are evangelists, too. It's not in what we say, it is in our lives, in how we act and what we do, and what we do not do...that we teach the message of Jesus.

When we face the bitter truths of our nation built on inequity, built on slave labor, on the dehumanization of brown and black lives...if we face this, if we repent of it, if we acknowledge and seek restoration and restitution that changes us, and the lives of others... then we begin to see the world that Jesus has called us to build.

Then, *our lives are the teachings of Jesus. We are evangelists, we are disciples, in body, and in word.*

Westminster has not shied away from hard work and hard conversations before. We have listened to our lesbian and gay and transgender siblings...we have sought to humbly learn, to grow into a larger welcome, to stand in solidarity, to work for justice and human rights. I remember your prophetic vote in 2007.

Many years ago, you acknowledged that my womanhood should not deprive me of my vocation to serve God, and to serve you. Eighteen years ago you called me and affirmed me as fully prepared to serve this faith community as your pastor. I remember that prophetic vote in 2002.

Westminster, we will now begin our own conversation about racial justice, with a Racial Equity Task Force convened by your Church Council and your Moderator. We will not hide from this urgent learning, this hard and humbling listening, this long-hoped-for, and long-overdue conversation. We will do this work, as disciples of Jesus.

You are disciples, so dear people of Westminster, receive a cup of cold water.

And know this, too, dear people, you will receive your reward for the cup that you share, in solidarity, in love, in compassion and mercy and justice.

Amen.