

Message for Sunday June 27 - Matthew 10 - v 40-42

NIV

40 “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Good morning everyone!

We have had the opportunity this morning to listen to, and to share our ideas about several aspects of what it is to be hospitable persons as Christians, individually and in the context of family and in our homes. My message today will look primarily at the 3 verses in Matthew 10 which we just heard Kiran read - Matthew 10 verses 40-42. and I will read them here again - ‘any *emphasis* is mine’

I came across some interesting word origins as I prepared for today’s message and those concern the word *hospitality* - the practice of being hospitable - the reception of guests and visitors and strangers with goodwill - the Latin root of the word is *hospes* which refers to a guest, visitor, and so from this root we get the word *hospital* of course--- and in opposition is the word *hostis* - stranger, foreigner, enemy.... and this is the root of the word *hostility*.

We generally do not expect to be complimented with being hospitable if we have entertained and looked after close family members or good friends in our homes. We would hardly expect our children to say “Thanks for your *hospitality* Ma and Pa, we’re off now!”. So it seems to be an expression that is tied to the interaction with persons who are less well known to us.. perhaps even strangers or perhaps people who speak a different language or come from a different culture.

Kiran and I have had the privilege of being hosts over the years to a wide range of individuals in our home and as I looked at the title that Ken gave to my message today, I thought - OK! Now is the time

maybe to look at our account and see how many points are redeemable or how many have time expired because of poor guest reviews on TripAdvisor! But I jest of course...

In this last section of Chapter 10 of Matthew, Jesus addresses his disciples directly, and not the persons who could potentially be the hosts of the disciples as they went on the journeys spreading the gospel. So the audience is His disciples, and in these three verses I think Jesus gives us, today as well, strong and clear messages indeed about being guests... messages for us *today* as we move amongst strangers in public spaces and as we include new people in our social circles and in the workplace.

So let us look together at sections of verse 41 and 42 in Matthew 10 again... and imagine that Jesus is speaking to his disciples as future guests who represent Him to the community. Earlier in v 40, Jesus promises that whoever welcomes the disciples will in fact be welcoming Him, and in turn will be welcoming His Father.

In v 41 we see here a description of the *guest*: we are told that the hosts who welcome a prophet '**as a prophet**' receive a prophet's reward. And all who welcome a righteous person '**as a righteous person**' will receive a corresponding award, of a righteous person.

So, in recognizing that there is a 'rider' in this deal for the hosts, I began to consider what a *guest* needs to be, in order to *somehow* allow the host to *qualify* for this reward. I began to ask myself about whether there is an objective scale or measurement that a host could refer to, in order to make a determination of how *discipled* I would appear to be in their presence. I was reminded also of the words of Maya Angelou: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." which I take to mean beyond mere cognition, and internalization of what you as a guest bring to the quality and nature of the relationship.

Back to the scripture - the disciple-guest appears to need to function as someone who *prophesizes*, someone with a prophetic ministry...the guest also needs to be a *righteous* person in order to be welcomed as a righteous person... and in v 42, the guests needs to present themselves as 'little ones'... going out into the world perhaps as relative novices, yet His disciples...and if a host offers

something as simple as a cup of cold water to those kinds of disciples, they will indeed receive a reward.

So, going forward I would like us to look a little more closely at three aspects of our **selves** that we present to our 'hosts' as we avail ourselves of their welcome and their hospitable natures, and as we move about in the world. I am going to go beyond merely being a guest in someone's private home and extend that thought to being a guest welcomed into new social circles or networks: that is - what it is to be prophetic and righteous and our understanding of our place as serious disciples, yet 'little ones' doing the work of the Kingdom of God.

What does being a prophet, or being prophetic mean in today's terms? Professor Walter Brueggemann, an emeritus at Columbia Theology, whom I paraphrase here, thinks that a prophet is a person who attempts to move through the world and navigate it as if God is really active in the world - that means being able to *identify* aspects of the world that are in conflict with what we believe God would *like* the world to be, but all the same being able to *talk* about God's will and God's *purpose* for the world, that *will* come to pass. Even when what we see and hear about our world today *does not at all* give us an impression that it *will* come to pass - we may not even be able to imagine it with our limited minds.

Taking that description of moving about today as *prophets* we must retain an ability to *interpret* the world according to our understanding of what is God's *idea* of the kind of world He would *approve* of...identifying what is wrong and making a *judgement* about why that is so. And in addition to that, and importantly, *retain* an *unshakeable* measure of hope - and *emanate* it...convey it by our words and also signal it via the decisions and choices we make; we must be able to see that what is in front and to the side of us every day is not **all** there is, and that only in aligning ourselves with what God wants for this world we can *believe* that we are indeed moving in tandem with a community which we love.

What though, if we are dismissed as mere **hopemongers** for the many people who are hurting, who are victims of so much economic injustice or circumstantial misfortune? How do we deal with their realities, when our words can be dismissed as those of vendors of pies in the sky? I have more questions today than answers!!

If we move about being consciously prophetic, do we need some mystical equipment, or can we be prophetic by imagining a world through the eyes of God of the Gospel. Can we believe that as ordinary people, not extraordinary and 'selected' individuals, we have the *same* promises as the latter to count on...the same promises on which we base our *communication* of the hope that is real and present today, in God's provisions for **all** who call Him Abba, Father.

Similarly, will look at the next part of verse 41 - we are called to exemplify *righteousness* in our lives, a *righteousness* visible to our hosts. This expectation seems to be very high - the disciples were to display a righteousness that exceeded that of the Pharisees, as Jesus explained in Matt 5. Again, this righteousness, which we have been promised, is given to us with grace, undeserving as we are, when we accept Christ. This *righteousness* would have been impossible to come even *close* to, by our own efforts at improving our behaviour in various areas of life, that is, according to the standard of Holy Rules. This righteousness is to be gauged by our hosts by the closeness of our walk with God and our deep understanding of His Love....a *righteousness* that is conceived in our inner heart attitude, from which our actions spring...a righteousness that can only come from a relationship with Christ and that is based on a deep awareness...an *awareness* that would allow us to confidently answer the question which Jesus asked Peter- "Who do you say I am?". A knowledge of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God - revealed to Peter and to us, ultimately.. by our Father in heaven.

This passage also speaks to us that we come to our worshipful life in society as simple children... children with a comfortable trust in God's provisions...when we enter into households of our hosts and into wider society... exuding gratitude for simple gifts bestowed upon us...without expecting or anticipating great rewards. We are called to move within society in simple and trusting faith. (of course, this assumes no abuse or neglect)

New International Version Matthew 18: 1-5 **18** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, **"Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"** **2** He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. **3** And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **4** Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. **5** And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

This is a very familiar passage and the context is important. This call to be childlike, was in response to the disciples wanting to know "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?". They were anxious about their own position in the pecking order. They were power and status conscious and needed to know if all their loyalty to Christ would "pay off". Jesus flips everything upside down. Jesus tells them to *not* worry about their position...children don't worry about position if they know how *well* they are loved and accepted. (anyone here with middle children - we can have a conversation later!)

Children are by and large not cynical or skeptical - until a certain age! - and hence are not pessimistic or distrustful and wary. How indeed can we, given the news-fatigue of our time become *those* sort of disciples today...other than by actively becoming much more actively conscious, every single day - of the work and promises through the Holy Spirit in our lives which we began to trust when we came to Christ. Will our 'hosts' in society recognize this simple quality in us?

To conclude - a host's work of hospitality is rewarded as Jesus has promised - promised to all who have shown us such grace and who have welcomed into their midst... and as Christ's representatives in today's world, we have, in this short passage, a *reminder* about our responsibilities, but also words of encouragement too...because that Jesus has referred to his disciples as 'one of these little ones' in the work of his Kingdom, as they knocked on doors on his behalf...holding firmly on to His precious gifts, promised to us through His loving grace.