

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

I want to start today with just a little general context information. First is that our gospel reading today is three short verses at the end of Matthew's chapter 10. And what we have had for the last few weeks is the second major section of Jesus' teaching after the Sermon on the Mount, which is in chapters five, six, and seven. Chapters eight and nine then narrate various episodes where Jesus' is teaching, healing, casting out demons, and raising the dead. And then at the end of chapter nine, Jesus looks at the crowd with compassion and remarks that they are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus probably meant us too. Then Jesus talks with the disciples about a labor shortage amidst a plentiful harvest.

The second item of context is to note this is the third consecutive Sunday devoted to Jesus' instructions to the disciples for their missionary journeys. Two weeks ago I asked why we are here and why we are Christians. Then I spoke about hope and trust relative to Jesus' pronouncement that "It is finished." Then last week I spoke about fear and then trusting and understanding that God is, in fact, here and at work in us and KLC. Once again these two ideas are linked together in the first two verses of our reading from Psalms which talk about the faithfulness and steadfast love of God from age to age.

Greg Carey in his commentary on our gospel reading today speaks of three movements or themes in Matthew's entire missionary discourse that we have had from Jesus to the disciples over the last two weeks and today. The first theme was to do the same signs and proclaim the same message as Jesus but to also expect hostilities. The second theme is that a disciple is not above their teacher. If Jesus faces violent opposition then the disciples should expect the same.

Today, the third theme is easy to find it is simply to welcome. To welcome a disciple is to welcome Jesus. To welcome others is to welcome Jesus. The word welcome is, in fact, used six times in these three short verses. I should also point out that the verses in our reading today are clear – it does not matter who receives care but what does matter is that care is given. We and the whole church see ourselves in the stories of the disciples. We, just like the disciples, are commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the reign of heaven and – and to demonstrate that reign through works of healing and liberation.

David Lose titled his commentary on our gospel reading today – No small Gestures. We often imagine discipleship requiring huge sacrifices or entailing great feats. That may even be true at times, yet, here Jesus appears to say it is nothing more than giving a cup of cold water to one in need. Or offering a hug to someone who is grieving. Or offering a ride to someone without a car. Or a listening ear to someone in need of a friend. Or volunteering. Or donating. Or whatever, on and on. You know – relationship and service.

David Lose went on to say: "Discipleship does not have to be heroic. The life of faith is composed of a thousand small gestures. Except that, according to Jesus, there are no small

gestures. Anything done in faith and love has cosmic significance for the ones involved and, indeed, the whole world God loves so much.

That my friends is a potentially huge impact. For example, have you heard of Loren Eiseley's story of "the star thrower"? A person is throwing starfish back in the ocean because if they do not get back in the water soon, they will dry out and die. Another person looking at all the starfish on the beach remarks to the first person: "you can't possibly hope to make any difference." The star thrower then replies but to the ones I throw back, it makes all the difference in the world. Know this my friends that each and every act of mercy rings through the eons and across the universe imbedded with God's love for the world, a love we can share anytime and anywhere with gestures that may seem small in the eyes of the world but loom large in the life of those who receive and witness them.

You may remember me talking some weeks ago about how many of our best loved hymns actually contain faulty theology. One of the hymns I mentioned at that time was "Just as I am, I come." It has occurred to me that I cannot recall the Israelites coming to God. It seems God always came to them and was either welcomed or rejected. This thought then made me think of Isaac Newton's third law which says: "To every action, there is always opposed an equal reaction." Action – reaction.

Further thought on my part yielded the idea that God's act of coming to us requires a reaction from us of either welcome or rejection. We as children and disciples of God and Jesus must then also react to those who come to us by either welcoming or rejecting. The obvious answer from Jesus is that we should always welcome with care and love.

Did you notice the last verse of our reading from Romans: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ." I am willing to bet that most of you are very familiar with the wages of sin is death part of this verse but are less familiar with the remainder of the verse which is actually the most important part. You know, the free gift of God. This same phenomenon applies to John 3:16 and John 3:17, and many other verses as well.

I have taken some excerpts from another Chad Bird article that talks about God's acts and power in the lives of the Israelites and in our lives. "At the Red Sea, the Lord of Israel showed his people that the entire duty of saving and redeeming them rested solely on his broad shoulders. By a strong east wind, blowing all night, he split the sea so all Israel strolled where fish had been swimming, with liquid walls raised to their right and left. Then, when the Egyptian army got the hare-brained idea of following the people of God, the walls became waves, falling to crush and drown the foe. In baptism, our "old Egyptian self," our sinful nature, is drowned and a new person, a new nature, recreated in Jesus, emerges from the other side of that baptismal sea. Baptism transforms us from Egyptians into Israelites." That my friends is how we become heirs of the kingdom, through an act of God.

Hear then the good news:

Martin Luther: “The whole life of a Christian, namely, that inwardly it consists in faith towards God, and outwardly in charity and good works towards our neighbour.”

Martin Luther: “When I have Christian righteousness reigning in my heart, I descend from heaven as the rain makes the earth; that is to say, I do good works, how and wheresoever the occasion arises.”

Martin Luther in these two quotes is simply talking about gestures of care, love, and welcome. Notice that he does not talk about the size of the gestures because Martin instinctively knew that there are no small gestures.

Mike Kroona this week in his God Pause devotions: “Hospitality opens the door to new possibilities. In the welcome, in opening the door, a chain reaction begins that leads to life and the presence of Jesus—and the presence of God.”

Mike Kroona: “But in Christ, grace has been shown to us. How might this grace open and lead us to share a cup of cold water with the little ones we are reluctant to encounter?”

This my friends is discipleship, true discipleship.

As you go about your daily lives this week, be welcoming in any way you can.

Amen