

June 29, 2014: "A Cup of Cold Water"

Gospel text: Matthew 10:40-42

Where you up at the park last weekend? Lots of people were.
On Saturday, I helped to park cars for Land of the Loon.
In the process, I became thirsty.
I enjoyed a cold bottle of water. Ahhh, did that taste good!

Did you watch the Land of the loon parade? I did.
I especially noticed the two entries from churches.
Our Pentecostal brothers and sisters handed out bottles of water.
Mmmm...how appropriate that would be for a sacramental church.

I was mowing last week.
I am not the young man I used to be. I have to take breaks while mowing.
As I do, I often go inside for a glass of ice water. I sit down and drink.
Ahhhhh, does that taste good! Cold...refreshing.
After a couple minutes, I can go back out and keep mowing.

Do you remember the old TV commercials for Nestea Ice Tea?
It's a hot day and the sun is beating down. A person is handed a tall glass of ice tea.
After drinking it, they fall backward into a pool of water.
They've taken the Nestea plunge.

These images come to mind when I hear our Gospel Reading this evening/morning.
On this summer day, my ears go right to the cup of cold water named in vs. 42:
Whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones will not lose their reward.
When you're thirsty, there is nothing that refreshes better than cold water.

Of course, I know...to be thirsty means more than being short on liquids.
It also means being in need. It means being incomplete. It means lacking what is necessary.
It means being short of full, abundant life.

The stories of Jesus in the Scriptures tell how he quenched the thirst of people, not only for liquid but also for life.
We have story after story of healing, people being made whole.
We have story after story of forgiveness and mercy and compassion, to the point of people being restored to life.
We have story after story of Jesus announcing hope and bringing peace and igniting joy.
In the Bible, Jesus refreshed people with a cup of cold water.

You and I are gathered here this day because we have found in Christ Jesus
the one who has restored us.
You have found forgiveness in him.

Your hope has been buoyed in him.
 You have found peace in him.
 You have experienced God's grace in Jesus, and that makes all the difference for you
 The cup of cold water has been given to you.
 It has come to you from God through the hands of others.

Our Gospel reading comes from chapter ten in Matthew.
 In Matthew, it is the second of five discourses, or collections of sayings, from Jesus.
 The whole chapter is devoted to Jesus sending out the disciples in mission.
 Behind all that sending out is this Gospel Truth: Christ Jesus has quenched our thirst and given us everything we need for abundant life.
 Our mission to the world is an extension of Jesus' mission.
 Our mission continues what Jesus had already started.
 God's power is now at work not only in Jesus, but in and through his disciples.
 Authority has been given to us...so how are we supposed to live?

I listen to these three Gospel verses and I hear the theme of welcome.
 Vs. 40 and 41: The word *welcome* appears many times
 Abraham story: God came to Abraham and Sarah in the form of three visitors; welcomed, to sit under a shade tree, prepared them a meal
 Hebrews 13:2: Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.
 Each of us, as a disciple of Christ, has been given a ministry of hospitality.
 Be a good host; welcome people; invite people; include people.
 Be gracious to others, because God has been gracious to you.
 I listen to these three Gospel verses and I also hear the theme of service.
 Vs. 42: Give a cup of cold water
 An act of kindness toward another
 -a compliment
 -in line, let someone in ahead of you
 -smile
 -look a person in their eyes and acknowledge them
 -overlook an improper word
 any action that builds up people and restores their spirits
 any action of caring/kindness/meeting need
 be gracious, as God is gracious

Although I am an idealist, I am also a realist.
 I understand that there is something deeply counter cultural about the faith.
 There is something upside down about the gospel that reverses the expectations of how we are to live.

The world says: you will be rewarded for your good deeds.
 That's why you should do them.

The gospel says:

You may be punished for doing good deeds. Do them anyway.

You risk exclusion and putdowns and disrespect for doing the right thing.

Do it anyway.

You will be taken advantage of and manipulated and used as response to your actions of caring.

Do them anyway.

Our example is Jesus.

He did boatloads of good deeds and was strung up on a cross.

Jesus told Peter, Feed my sheep.

Jesus told the disciples, give a cup of cold water to a little one, only because they need it.

We don't do good deeds for rewards, no matter what the world says.

We do good deeds because they are good...

because that's what gives life...

because that's what it means to follow Jesus.

The world says: the needs are too great.

You can't make any difference. Don't even try.

There is way too much difficulty. There are so many people who need help.

Best just to take care of yourself and let others fend for themselves.

That's called cynicism, and I confess to you how so many times I hear it...

and how often it takes hold of me.

This week, I read this line:

It is better to light a single candle than to sit and curse the darkness.

Let's don't curse the darkness...that's easy to do.

Everybody does that.

There's nothing honorable in that.

Let's don't preoccupy ourselves with all that is wrong with the world.

There is plenty.

Everybody does that.

Instead, let's hear the invitation from God to live differently...

To live counter-culturally...to live faithfully.

Light one candle.

Throw one starfish back into the sea.

Speak one word of kindness.

Do one act of goodness.

Share one cup of cold water.

Because you are forgiven in Christ.

Because mercy has been shown you.

Because God has blessed you.

Peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.