

Sermon - Proper 8A

The Text: Matthew 10:40-42

'Welcoming God'

"Anyone who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives the Father who sent me." (v. 40 NLT)

It's always good to feel welcome when we go somewhere new. For example, if we are visiting a church we've never been to for the first time, it can be very awkward to know where to go, what we need, when to sit or stand in the service, or where the toilets are. If we are visiting people in their homes, we can be very thankful that we have the right address to begin with, but also that the people we are visiting are warm in their welcome to us. It's a real blessing to be invited into people's homes, to spend time with them over a tea or coffee (or maybe something a little bit stronger), and to talk with them about life and the journey of faith that we're all on.

In the same way, it is important for us to be a welcoming congregation. Through the way we welcome people, people who connect with us for the first time can feel at ease when they meet us, they can find a sense of belonging with us, and they can feel comfortable and valued while they are among us.

Our gospel reading for today, Matthew 10:40-42, comes at the end of Jesus' instructions to his Twelve Disciples before he sent them out on their first missionary journey. Jesus warned them that not everyone would welcome them and receive the message they brought (vv13b,14). However, Jesus also said that those households which did receive them would also receive the peace of God (v13a). Then, at the end of his instructions, Jesus went even further by saying that those who welcomed his disciples also welcomed him, and by receiving him, they even welcomed the presence of God among them.

Stop and think about that for a moment...

On the one hand, these were Jesus' specific instructions to a certain group of people at a particular time and place. However, as followers of Jesus whom he continues to send out into our time and place, we can also hear Jesus saying that when people welcome us, they welcome him and the presence of God with us.

One reason why this is really important is because often people ask where God is in the world. When people are hurting, confused, struggling or broken by life's circumstances, God can often seem to be absent and uncaring. Jesus is saying

here that God is present in the struggles, pain, uncertainty and joys of life through his people. As we live in the good news of God's present and coming Kingdom, and as we participate with God in his mission to bring his peace into the world, God is present in the living, breathing body of his Son in the world. God makes himself known and extends his healing, life, cleansing and liberating presence in the lives of the people around us through our words and actions by the power of his Holy Spirit.

How do our words and actions reflect the grace and love of Jesus and our heavenly Father to others? As people welcome us into their homes and lives, is the presence of our forgiving and peace-giving God made real in their lives through us?

As Jesus' disciples, he calls us to grow in the peace God gives us through faith in his grace so that we can be bringing his peace, hope and love to everyone that we meet. The goal of living and growing as Jesus' disciples is just as much about making the Kingdom of God real in our world by extending God's gracious and life-giving presence to everyone who welcomes us as it is about getting into heaven when we die. We can make the coming Kingdom of God real in our homes, our work places, our schools or anywhere we are welcomed and received by other people. The promise of Jesus is that they welcome him as they welcome us, and by welcoming him they also receive the presence of God who is the source of all life. This is the God who forgives sinners, who shows grace to those who need it the most but deserve it the least, who brings the light of new life out of the darkness of death, who serves his followers by washing their feet, and who gives us his all in his self-sacrificing love of the cross.

As we begin a new week, who will welcome you into their homes, their workplaces, or their lives this week? How can you be the peace-filled and grace-giving presence of God in the joys and challenges, struggles and problems they are facing? Ask the Holy Spirit of God to keep you close to Jesus through faith so that, as people welcome you this week, they may also welcome Jesus in you, and they may find peace in the presence of our gracious and loving God in you.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.