

Sermon Text – Sunday, June 28, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Jeremiah 28:5-9; 2nd Reading: Romans 6:12-23
Scripture for Message: Matthew 10:40-42 “Hospitality”

This scripture reading marks the end of the instructions Jesus gave his disciples before sending them “like sheep among wolves” into dangerous territory, to be “laborers in the field.” He gave them words of warning and words of comfort telling them to have no fear – Jesus reminded them that they had value and they would be in the “Father’s” care. These three verses have so much to say about welcoming and about hospitality. In this message are Jesus’ instructions to his disciples that when the communities they are sent to welcome them, those communities will receive rewards. It speaks to me about welcoming the one who God sends to bring the good news – that would include prophets, teachers of the word, and preachers or ministers. Is this, however, a message for only the ones God sends? Could it also be a message for all of us?

In this scripture is the message that whoever welcomes a believer welcomes Christ, welcomes God. Furthermore, we don’t know whether the people we encounter in our everyday lives are believers, so we must welcome others indiscriminately since a simple welcome might reveal a mustard seed of faith. Jesus tells the disciples whoever welcomes you – his disciples are believers – welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Since we can’t recognize believers by appearance, by welcoming the stranger, foreigner, refugee, and people who are not like us we welcome Christ and will receive the appropriate reward.

How, then, do we recognize a true believer or a prophet of God? Jesus and Paul both warn against “false prophets.” The mere action of a person or group of persons walking around and calling for their community to repent – does not make them prophets of God. Scripture tells us that God is love and you will be able to recognize a true prophet as they emphasize love and call us into the service of love, justice, equity, and mercy. In our scripture reading from Jeremiah this morning, Jeremiah confronts and contradicts the false prophets of his time who prophesy a quick return of the exiles and makes the statement “when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.” God’s prophets proclaim truth, even when the truth is not

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what God's people want to hear. This scripture from Matthew's gospel reminds us to receive these prophets of God in the name of Jesus.

I wonder if Jesus' point in giving these final words to his followers was that they too were to be welcoming as they carry the message that "the kingdom has come near." Because that message of welcome and hospitality works both ways – by welcoming others you are welcoming Christ. In his message to them Jesus calls his followers, including you and me, to represent Christ to the stranger and to encounter Christ in the stranger – in the "least of these." Take note that there is eternal significance to hospitality.

In my mind there is a question left unanswered, Jesus states that those who welcome believers will receive a "reward." Is there, however, spiritual danger in welcoming the "wrong" people? What if, by chance or design, we choose to welcome the unbelievers? What is there to be gained by welcoming the stranger and alien who is not like us – who may believe and practice their beliefs differently? Jesus addresses that question with his next statement.

Think about Jesus' statement, "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." Do you wonder what he means by telling the disciples this? When Jesus mentions the "little ones" he might mean more than children, "little ones" would refer to those who are considered less than – the "least of these" would be an appropriate alternate phrase to use. We think of giving a "cup of cold water" as a simple gesture – in Jesus' time it was more complicated. Water was stored in stone jars for daily use; it would not be cold unless it was fresh from a well. To give a cup of "cold" water a person would have to go to the well and draw a fresh bucket of water. That would not be a simple task – giving a cup of cold water in Jesus' time would be a sacrificial task of radical welcome. The message is that our most ordinary gestures carry some of the most profound meanings.

Clearly hospitality to missionary disciples provides the immediate context for Jesus' message as Matthew records in this scripture. It is, however, irresponsible to believe the message is only for that group. Jesus' message is to the entire faith community to extend hospitality beyond the evangelists. We are to welcome the homeless, the displaced, and the helpless, the vulnerable and weak in any culture. Hospitality should harbor

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no hidden goals and expect no reciprocity – it flows naturally from a Christian's routine activities of life.

There are broad implications in this message for the church, more so than for individuals. If we acknowledge that this message is about believers welcoming the ones sent, can we consider the church as “the ones sent” and therefore anticipate the church will be welcomed as righteous prophets? Maybe if we hold too tightly to that premise, we might misunderstand the fact that participation in the church is declining. If we expect the world to welcome the church in that manner, why is that not happening?

On the other hand, could the church be the ones these followers of Christ are sent to – the ones receiving the word? In that case then the church is the one to receive the rewards by welcoming the messenger. Are we welcoming and hospitable? Is the church offering even a cup of cold water to the “little ones?” This message implies that whoever welcomes either a prophet or a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous or a prophet's reward. That reward is, in my opinion, eternity.

It seems to be widespread practice for Christians to place themselves in the story. It might be helpful for us to notice how the role of the reader changes. We can see ourselves as the ones to whom the “disciples are sent” but also see ourselves as the ones who are sent by Jesus to proclaim and teach, we can also see ourselves as the “little ones” to whom the cup of cold water is given. In a broader context, this applies to the church as well.

This scripture tells us that whoever welcomes the messenger welcomes Christ and in turn welcomes the “Father” who sent him. Let me repeat that God calls the church, God calls each of us, to represent Christ to the “little ones” and to encounter and recognize Christ in the “little ones.” I wonder if a group of people can truly consider themselves to be a “church” if they are not “Christs to each other.” If a church does not “Go into all the world, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, preaching the Gospel to all nations” then it is not a church but a social club.

Not only is the church sent out to proclaim that the kingdom is near, but also the church is called to receive and welcome the messengers. That is not to say that the church can choose which messenger it welcomes; the church should welcome all. The church can try to discern

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which messenger is the true prophet of God and thus discern what “prophecy” the church should believe but hospitality is not negotiable even in that context. As previously mentioned, a true prophet of God is one who calls us into the service of love, justice, equity, and mercy. If the message is not love but hate and divisiveness, God is not there. If the message is not mercy but retaliation and revenge, God is not there.

Like I said earlier, these three verses have a great deal to say about hospitality and welcome. In Matthew’s gospel you can get a sense that the author cares a lot about hospitality. Matthew, being a tax collector, was not welcomed within his community until Jesus saw him and called him. The community originally receiving Matthew’s gospel might also have felt the sting that a lack of welcome and hospitality would carry. They were a largely Jewish community who felt forced from the familiar synagogues because they followed Jesus, and they were a community primarily dominated by Roman Imperial power. They, like churches today, could place themselves in the several roles this passage of scripture suggests. Matthew’s message is that a Christian community, relying on Jesus must be an active and faithful alternative community of loving, merciful, inclusive, praying, missional servants. A Christian community must be welcoming and show hospitality to all – we might have the mindset that “You never know who you are helping” however, we do know, we always know because Jesus has told us, “Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me.”

May it be so.