

A Cup of Cool

As a part of his work on a doctoral thesis, a college student spent a year with a group of Native Americans Navajo on a reservation in the Southwest. He lived with one family, sleeping in their house, eating their food, working with them and generally living the life of a twentieth-century Native American Navajo. The old grandmother of the family spoke no English, yet a very close friendship formed between the two. They spent a great deal of time together, sharing a friendship that was meaningful to each, yet unexplainable to anyone else. In spite of the language difference, they shared the common language of love and understood each other. Over the months he learned a few phrases of Navajo, and she picked up a little of the English language. When it was time for him to return to the campus and write his thesis, the tribe held a going-away celebration. It was marked by sadness since the young man had become close to the whole village and all would miss him. As he prepared to get up into the pickup truck and leave, the old grandmother came to tell him good-bye. With tears streaming from her eyes, she placed her hands on either side of his face, looked directly into his eyes and said, "I like me best when I am with you."

Every story in the Gospel of Mark is also found in the Gospel of Matthew; but the stories in Matthew are shorter. It's like the author of Matthew used the Gospel of Mark as his resource. But Matthew does have something that is not found in Mark. The five major sermons Jesus delivers to his disciples and followers: The Sermon on the Mount, a sermon that contains a collection of parables, a sermon that gives the instructions for the community, a sermon on the end times, and a sermon that gives instructions for mission work.

In Matthew 10 Jesus gives a sermon on missions to his disciples and followers. At the end of the chapter Jesus concludes his sermon with words of encouragement. In verse 40 Jesus says:

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

Jesus tells his disciples that they are to be his emissaries and whoever welcomes them welcomes Jesus himself.

In the beginning of the chapter Jesus summoned his twelve disciples. They were Jesus' apostles, or "sent ones." Apostle is a title that denotes a commissioned messenger or ambassador. These "sent ones" were the emissaries of Jesus just as Jesus was the emissary of God. In the ancient world emissaries were the authorized representatives of the one who sent them. They could speak and act on his behalf as if they were the person himself. Today we have instant communication at our fingertips. We have computers, we have cell phones, and we have blackberries with cell phones and computers all in one. In those days emissaries carried letters of introduction from the sender. They were authorized to represent the interests of the one they served. In both Greek and Hebrew the term "angels" referred to the sent ones who delivered messages from Yahweh. Jesus is God's emissary and the commissioned disciples were Jesus' emissaries. Those who welcome these emissaries are welcoming Jesus and welcoming the one who sent Jesus.

Verse 41 says:

"Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous;"

Who is Jesus talking about in verse 41 when he refers to the prophet and the righteous person? It's hard to know exactly, but some scholars believe that Jesus is just restating the previous message using slightly different words. Other scholars believe that these terms constitute two different categories of Jesus' disciples. The prophet is the one who preaches and proclaims the word of God and the righteous person is the one who is the shining example of goodness. But that is not what Jesus is talking about in this verse. He is talking about those who receive his emissaries, the ones who help, who support, who aid and assist the prophets and the righteous person. To receive them and their teaching is to receive the rewards of the prophet and the righteous person.

Verse 42 takes this a step further:

“and 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.”

In the original Greek, the word “water” is omitted, and the text is read as “a cup of cool.” A traveler in hot dusty Palestine would be grateful for a cup of cold water. This cup was a symbol of providing for someone’s needs. It was a gift of hospitality and a welcoming of another disciple into your home or community. The term “little ones” may have been how members of Jesus’ community described themselves. It has different meanings in other parts of scripture, but Jesus used this term as an intimate expression to describe these disciples. The little ones were not leaders, they were not great orators, and they were far from shining example of righteousness. They were poor; they lived on the wrong side of the tracks. Their class, race, and gender were all wrong. But they still followed Jesus. These were the people that Jesus really cared about and protected; these little ones. This final verse speaks to those of us not called to be in leadership roles; it gives a message of mutual ownership of the ministry of the church, whether you are a prophet, righteous person or one of the little ones.

Next weekend Emilee Rose, Robert Franks, some of the youth and I will be traveling to Beaufort South Carolina for another mission trip. This trip will be my 22nd mission trip since 1990. I’m like the transporter for a bunch of kids going on a road trip to paint, repair, and build something for someone we don’t even know. We become the emissaries of this body, Crossroads Church, going out to bring Good News to those we meet along the way. Now it’s not likely that any of these kids will be preaching or teaching on these trips, but they may be putting a new coat of paint on a house, building a ramp for someone who is confined to a wheel chair, putting skirting around a house trailer, tearing down an old shed, cutting down weeds that have grown up around a house, or cleaning the inside of that house. They could also be listening to an older person tell their story or they might share their lunch with a child who lives in the house. The best part of these trips is the stories the kids tell on the way home. The stories of how their resident cooked them lunch, bought them ice cream for a treat, or even gave them a cup of cool water. I’ve also been blessed with the hospitality of the people we meet. In the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee a woman grilled hamburgers for my crew and gave

us fresh tomatoes from her garden; I heard stories from Abraham Spotted Elk Jr. a Shoshone elder in Ethete Wyoming; a Lakota woman from Pine Ridge gave me Star Quilt, and I drank cool water from a well at John Farris' house in Beersheba Springs Tennessee. We are the little ones who have been given a cup of cool and those who bless us with this hospitality are the ones who will receive the rewards of the prophets, the righteous, and the little ones. They are the ones Jesus talks about at the end of his sermon on missions.

You know I love taking kids on mission trips, love the adventure, the unexpected blessings, and the stories that the kids tell. When I get back I really love handing the kids to their parents and finding a place to sleep for a day and a half.

My belief is that Matthew 10:40-42 speaks to us as Crossroads Church, as the Body of Christ. We are the prophets, the righteous and the little ones who Jesus is calling to go out into the world. But that is only half of what Jesus is calling us to do. We also need to be the ones who welcome others in the name of the prophets, the righteous, and give a cup of cool to one of these little ones. It's a two-way street. These three verses, set side by side, complete a picture of the commissioning work that Jesus sets out for us; welcoming Christ and those who are His emissaries, supporting the ministry of missions in the church, and caring for one another. It's when we care for each other in this way that we can say, *"I like me best when I am with you"* like the Navajo grandmother said to the college student in the story.

So how do we take Jesus' words and use them in other areas of our life together? We need to listen to each other. How often does someone tell us when we try to care, "No, I don't need any help; I'm fine, thanks?" Can we be aware enough, tuned in enough to know their real needs, and sensitive enough for them to let us give them that cup of cold water without infringing on their pride or their dignity? Maybe what we need is some low key "Cup of Cold Water Strategies" by little people for little people, whether these little people are disciples or not.

The church and Jesus will always need their great speaker, their great examples of sainthood, their great teachers, those whose names are household words; but the church and Jesus will always need those in whose homes there is hospitality, on whose hands there is all the service which makes a home, and in whose hands there is the caring which is God's love. As Robert Browning said, "*All service ranks the same with God.*"

Today we will commission those who are going to South Carolina next week. This is the time that you pass on the authority for us to be emissaries of Crossroads Church and emissaries of Jesus. Jesus commissioned the disciples at the end of Matthew to form a world wide mission community of Jewish and Gentile disciples who would live out his teaching. To be an alternative community with commitments and practices that opposes Roman values. The gods in Roman literature commissioned Rome to world wide domination and military superiority. Matthew's community is given a similar goal, not by Jupiter or other Roman gods but by Jesus. Instead of military power, it employs Jesus power; compassionate power, healing power, merciful power, inclusive community, and life giving words to proclaim and endorse God's kingdom. We are the emissaries of Jesus. We are the emissaries of the one who sent Him.

Would the worship team please come up and can we have those who are going on the mission trip come to the center aisle and everyone else gather in to pray for this group of youth and adults who are going on the journey to South Carolina? Debbie will close the prayer.