

**Sermon /2 July 2023/ Matthew 10:40-42/ Dah Who Doraze
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“People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Illustrious poet Maya Angelou said that.

“People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.”

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells us to make people feel welcome.

My friends, whoever welcomes you, welcomes Jesus. And therefore, they also welcome God.

Jesus said it – right there in today's gospel lesson. “Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.”

Jesus is talking to his disciples. Today's passage comes right after the Gospel we heard last week where Jesus tells his friends that in order to save their lives, they must lose them. Jesus also shared that he's come to earth to bring a sword and not peace – and that family members will be at each other's throats over their beliefs.

Today, it seems like Jesus is trying to make them feel better after those dire warnings. You are the ambassadors of me, Jesus tells them. There will be rewards for you. You will be welcomed.

It feels good to hear that doesn't it. That anyone who welcomes us – you and me – is welcoming Christ.

But, as is always the case, I'm not the only person to whom Jesus is speaking. The idea of welcome cuts both ways. I – we – are to be welcomed just like Jesus. And I – we – are supposed to welcome everyone else as if we were meeting Jesus.

That's a lot of responsibility in both directions, isn't it?

We – you and I – are Christ's ambassadors here on earth. In his letters, Paul tells us that we are “in Christ.” John writes in his Gospel that “Christ abides in us.” So, wherever we go, Christ is there, too.

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, we read the often-quoted 25th chapter which is not unlike what we are hearing today. Jesus is in every person and we are to treat everyone we meet as if they are Jesus.... because they ARE Jesus.

In that 25th chapter of Matthew, I think we often get caught up in the moments when Jesus is hungry or thirsty or naked and we can do the very tangible acts of giving food, or drink or clothing.

But what about the part where Jesus says, “When you welcomed a stranger, you welcomed me.” Jesus says the same thing in today’s Gospel. Whoever welcomes you, welcome me.

Welcome. What does it mean to welcome someone? What does it feel like to be welcomed?

“People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.”

I suspect that each of us has a memory of feeling welcomed – safe, secure, happy. It’s a good feeling to be welcomed – to be accepted. You might remember some of the details of being welcomed - some of the acts that were done or things that were said. But you will always remember the feeling of being welcomed. Because we all know when we’ve been welcomed....and when we haven’t.

For me, the memory of traveling to a distant relative’s home for a holiday comes to mind when I think of welcome. I can’t recall the exact people who were there, but I definitely remember the warmth of the home, the smell of the food, the hugs and the laughter and the tears, and the joy throughout the day. That incredible feeling that I was included and wrapped in the security and love of those people in that place, in that moment.

It is our Christian call to make everyone feel welcome – just like that feeling we remember from the times we were welcomed.

When we welcome someone in the name of Christ, the things we do will be different and the words we say will be different from a favorite welcome WE remember. But that feeling of love and belonging should be the same.

“People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Today’s gospel passage concludes with Jesus telling his friends that no act of welcome - no act of kindness - is too small to be noticed or important.

Jesus says, “whoever gives even a cup of cold water to someone my name will never lose their reward.”

A cup of cold water. A simple act of kindness which will cost you nothing. Jesus says “even” “even” that is worthy of much. A cup of cold water. A friendly smile. A sincere handshake. A kind word or compliment. Noticing someone standing alone. Realizing someone is lost. Sitting with someone who is ill. Reaching out to someone you’ve never met. Truly listening to what someone has to say. Even” these acts are sometimes a radical welcome in a world glued to their smart phone screens.

When we think of “welcome”, we think of making sure the stranger, the new kid, the person we’ve never seen before feels comfortable in a new situation. Hopefully we go out of our way to welcome the stranger. We are called to do so.

But we also must be certain to have time left for those close to us. If we spend all our time and energy with those people we’ve just met, we go home at the end of the day with

nothing left to welcome our loved ones. Our spouse, significant other, siblings, children, family members, house mates, neighbors. They too must feel loved, secure, heard, and recognized.

These people who are near to us need to be welcomed just as much as the stranger. We can't take them for granted. They are thirsty for a cup of cold water, too.

And while you're at it, take a look in the mirror. We have established that Jesus is in all of us. That means Jesus is in you, too. You need to welcome yourself as Jesus just as you do the stranger and those who are close to you. Cups of cold, self-care water are needed for you as well.

It's a difficult balancing act, I know. Jesus didn't say welcoming everyone in his name... welcoming everyone as you'd welcome him – would be easy. He simply told us to do it. As Christians, it is not an option to say, "this is too hard" and throw up our hands and give up. We must try and try and try again. It's up to us to find the right balance – to set the boundaries required – that will allow us to welcome everyone we meet.

Because truly welcoming someone does not happen only the first time you meet them – or when you see them for the first time in a long time – or at the end of a long workday. Welcome means that you are always attentive to them, watching out for their well-being, hearing them, seeing them, respecting them, loving them.

It is our Christian call to consciously welcome and attend to the Christ in everyone.
Christ in the stranger.
Christ in the enemy.
Christ in the friend.
Christ in the spouse.
Christ in the sibling.
Christ in the politician who makes your blood boil.
Christ in the faithful person who believes differently than you.
Christ in the gentle soul who loves differently than you.
Christ in the person who identifies differently than you.
Christ in the person who doesn't look like you.
Christ in the person who doesn't welcome you.
Christ in everyone.

When we can see the Christ in all those around us, we'll be better able to accept the Christ in us.

And welcome them all with open arms and gestures big and small. With a cup of cold water.

“People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Make them feel welcome.

I would like to thank Rick Morely and his article “Sit Up Straighter” from his blog “A Garden Path” for the inspiration for today’s sermon.