

Scripture:

Matthew 10:40-42

“Christian hospitality.”

Someone once said ---- “There is no mystical far away Christ ---- but only the Christ who enters our door and our hearts.”

“There is no mystical far away Christ ---- but only the Christ who enters our door and our hearts.”

And today --- in our gospel reading the focus is on precisely this ---- the Christ who enters our doors.

Today in Matthew’s gospel --- unlike many other passages ----- the focus of the gospel is not about a message to be heard --- and instead it is all about a person to be received and welcomed.

Last week --- in the 15 or so verses that precede our reading from Matthew’s gospel today --- Jesus spends a considerable amount of time ---- warning His disciples about how poorly they will often be treated and received.

Our reading last week ----- Matthew 10: 24-39 ---- is basically Jesus’ warning to His disciples that they will be often be scorned --- rejected --- and greeted with contempt ----- just as He so often was.

And now today --- in contrast --- Jesus speaks about the benefits and delights in Christian discipleship and Christian hospitality.

Last week --- in Matthew 10:24-39 ----- Jesus speaks about the rupture discipleship will often place on his followers most valued relationships – including family.

And now today --- in Matthew 10:40-42 ----- Jesus speaks about the delight and the rewards of discipleship.

In Matthew’s gospel today Jesus talks about the new relationship between believers and Jesus and God --- and how this new relationship affects all others --- and specifically how this new relationship includes a radically new understanding and practice of Christian hospitality.

If we go a little further on In Matthew's gospel --- past our passage for today --- we find Jesus saying ---- in chapter 25 verse 40 --- "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me" --- and then a few verses later ---- "whatever you did not do for the least of these you did not do for me."

"whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me" --- and ---- "whatever you did not do for the least of these you did not do for me." ----- are basically another way of saying what our passage for today says.

In a nut shell what Jesus is saying is -----

How you receive or welcome others reflects how you receive and welcome me.

How you treat and receive and welcome others ---- reflects --- shows me how you might treat and receive and welcome me.

Christian hospitality is all about receiving and welcoming and treating others just as we would Christ Himself.

Jesus always welcomed --- received and treated people with the utmost of dignity and respect --- and so ought we to.

And we ought to regardless of who we are --- and regardless of who they are.

Whether we're respected and elected officials ----- whether we hold a high or low --- or no position at all in society ----- whether the people we meet are high or low or in between ----- we are to treat people with respect and dignity --- and we are to receive them and welcome them just as Jesus Himself did.

In our gospel passage today Jesus talks about receiving prophets --- righteous people ---- and what He refers to as little ones.

And we could spend half our time together today trying to figure out what is meant by prophet --- what is meant by righteous one --- and what is meant

by little one ---- and then we could spend the rest of our time together trying to figure out who their modern day equivalents might be.

But suffice it so say --- prophets in the time of Christ --- were people who were well known --- some were respected --- and others despised----- some were treated like dignitaries or celebrities ---- and others were turned away like thieves.

And then there were also righteous people.

And righteous people were just like their title sounds ----- that is they were people who tried to do what was right and upstanding ----- they were basically good ----- solid --- well respected people who did what was right -- ---- and honest ---- and true.

And then there are the little people.

Little people were the category of people ---- that would include most people.

To be little didn't mean you were any less --- to be a little person meant you were basically an everyday person who probably wouldn't be recognized once you left your own town or city and journeyed to neighbouring communities.

Little people --- like righteous people ---- were people who --- outside of or away from their friends and family ---- weren't usually recognized or very well known.

Little people were everyday people who went about living their lives in ways that don't often get noticed ----- they lived away from the limelight and attention of others.

Part of what Jesus teaches in Matthew's gospel today is that ----- not everyone is a prophet or a righteous person ----- but every one is someone important ----- a little person is till someone important ----- and everyone ----- prophet ----- priest --- kings --- and little one's --- all deserve hospitality.

“He who receives you receives me --- and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.” ---- Jesus says ----- verse 40.

“He who receives you receives me --- and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.”

In other words when we receive people ----- when we welcome them ----- we are in fact welcoming not only them but Christ and God into our homes -- hearts ---- or presence.

That’s a pretty serious task ----- to be hospitable to others they way we would be hospitable to Christ.

To welcome and receive others the way we would welcome and receive Jesus Christ.

How many of us can honestly say we always do this?

Haw many of us can honestly say we welcome and receive everyone just as though they were Jesus Christ Himself?

Some of us some of the time ---- probably ---- yes.

All of us ---- all of the time --- doubtful.

It’s a tall task ----- but it is what the gospel asks of us according to Matthew 10:40-42 today --- and also elsewhere.

Welcoming and receiving is at the heart of every relationship that Jesus speaks about in our few short verses today.

Whether it be prophet --- righteous one --- or everyday person --- “little ones” ----- what Jesus asks of us is exactly the same ---- welcome and receive them ----- extend hospitality to them.

And not just any welcome or reception ---- not just any kind of shabby or weak hospitality ----- but the very same welcome --- reception --- and hospitality ---- that you would extend if I ---- Jesus ----- were coming to you.

And there’s a far more radical side to this as well if we take it a step further.

If we take these verses seriously --- part of what we see is that not only are we are to accept others as Jesus did --- and accept them as though they were Christ Himself.

But ----- regardless of what group we fit into --- prophet --- righteous person ----- or little one ----- regardless of who we are ----- people are to identify us with Jesus and Jesus with us.

People are to identify us with Jesus and Jesus with us.

How many of us would be wiling and comfortable saying something like ---- “If you receive me --- you receive Jesus.” ---- to people when we walk in their home.

“If you receive me you receive Jesus.”

If we said this people might think we take ourselves a bit too seriously.

Many of us have been brought up and taught that the goal to which we aspire is Jesus.

And this makes perfect sense and is indeed faithful.

Shoot for Jesus ---- aim for Christ likeness ---- all the while recognizing that we will fall short of this --- makes perfect sense.

However --- sometimes we focus to a fault on the gap between who we are and Jesus.

We’re here --- full of faults and weakness --- and Jesus is over there perfect and faultless ----- when we do this we can all too easily present the gospel as something outside of ourselves ---- something over there --- or out there that we’re aiming for.

As opposed to something in here that we’re striving for.

If we approach Christ likeness as something out there --- or over there ---- instead of in here ---- we can all too easily miss the point.

The point that sometimes ---- often even --- people ought to meet Jesus through us --- almost because of us --- and not just over there ---- or out there somewhere.

People sometimes ---- often even --- meet Jesus through personal encounter with others who have met Him ----- through hospitality.

It has been suggested that the evangelism of the 21st century will be hospitality.

The evangelism of the 21st century will be hospitality.

Evangelism in our current age is less about a message to be heard and more about how we receive and welcome a person.

Evangelism in our time --- some people think --- has more to do with how we receive and welcome a person than it does the message or words we share with them ----- and I think there's some truth to this.

We're all familiar with the expression ---- "Don't shoot the messenger."

"Don't get mad at me just because I'm the one who has to tell you that your son or daughter flunked out of school."

"Don't get mad at me just because I'm the one telling you that your car was stolen or your roof has a leak."

"I'm only the bearer of the news not the cause of it --- don't get mad at me." ----- don't shoot the messenger.

Sometimes we mistakenly put a distance between the gospel and ourselves -- - and it can be a cop out --- an easy and unfaithful way out of the demands of the gospel.

"My life may not be very Christ like --- and that's O.k. --- because I'll just share the message without really living it." ----- doesn't cut it --- it isn't good enough.

"Don't look at me as a role model or as an example of Christ --- just listen to what I say." ----- doesn't cut it --- isn't good enough.

Matthew 10 doesn't work this way.

There needs to be a radical consistency between the Jesus we proclaim and the lives we live.

Christians who are offensively loud ----- or mean spirited ----- or in your face --- rarely serve the cause of Christ well.

Few people want to believe the gospel if the one's proclaiming it are the one's people generally want to avoid in life.

“If Jonathan is such and uncouth --- ungrateful --- loud mouth ----- that no one would ever even want to have over for dinner ----- then what difference does it make if he can reel off the ten commandments --- or the sermon on the mount from memory?”

Few people will ever be willing to receive Jesus' presence into their lives if they are not willing to receive those who represent that same Jesus.

People are to identify us with Jesus and Jesus with us.

People aren't just to identify Jesus' teachings with us and us with His teachings.

People are to identify us with Jesus and Jesus with us --- this is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today.

And ----- according to Matthew 10 ----- hospitality is a huge part of this.

And according to Matthew 10 --- long before we even open our mouths ---- our hospitality is our evangelism.

“He who receives you receives me --- and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.”

How we receive others often speaks volumes about our faith far more than what we say and teach says about our faith.

Being welcoming is often the very first ----- and most important step in evangelism --- sharing Christ.

Think of Jesus with the woman at the well in John chapter 4.

The very first thing that catches her attention is Jesus' welcoming ----- hospitable --- non judgmental nature.

When we welcome people ----- we soon become bound with them.

Put another way --- by a Canadian ---- I had to have at least one Canadian reference near Canada day --- Marshall McLuhan said ----- the medium is the message.

The medium --- the act of welcoming ----- becomes the message ----- you are welcomed --- you are to make yourself welcome and at home here.

Welcoming people ----- receiving them ---- extending hospitality --- are not just one off events that die in their being lived out.

We never just welcome someone and then the relationship or interaction dies off.

By the very nature of welcoming them ---- receiving them ---- extending hospitality to them ----- we have created a setting that then enables us to articulate God's way in others ways too ---- words for example.

Great and often very simple acts of hospitality generate the social settings where God's love can be articulated ----- discerned and either accepted or rejected.

Great acts of hospitality generate the social settings where God's way can be articulated ----- discerned ----- and then either accepted or rejected.

In other words acts of hospitality ----- are often the very first act of evangelism.

As Christians we often talk about planting seeds --- doing something or saying something that is like a seed ---- a small beginning --- something that requires other actions in order to grow.

Similar to the way a seed needs soil ---- light --- and water in order to grow -
 --- so ---- many acts of sharing Jesus Christ --- often require other further
 acts for that first one to take root.

Part of what the gospel is telling us today is that very often that first act ---
 that first seed ----- isn't about words shared --- but hospitality extended -----
 a welcoming reception.

I think there is something to be said for hospitality being the evangelism of
 the 21st century.

I don't think that's the final word on the idea of evangelism in our time -----
 but like hospitality itself --- I do think it's a great place to start --- as it
 always has been.

Christian hospitality enables ---- and generates the social settings where
 God's way can then be articulated --- discerned and then either accepted or
 rejected.

And it all starts with a welcome and loving reception.

And it starts with the realization that we have to represent Jesus and see
 ourselves as ambassadors for Christ --- and see ourselves as models --- as
 little examples of Christ.

It might be a great help to our cause ---- desiring that all would come to
 know Christ--- if we thought about living our lives such that we could
 honestly say --- do as I say ---- and --- do as I do.

Do as I say ---- and ---- see how in my life --- I too am doing my very best to
 do as I say --- to do as Christ would do and say.

Because really anyone can say --- "Do as I say --- not as I do."

That's a bit of a cop out isn't it --- if we think all we have to do is model one
 part of Christ --- saying the right things --- and not also the other part as well
 ----- doing the right things.

Sharing Christ starts with hospitality.

With receiving and welcoming.

“He who receives you receives me --- and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.”

And then put another way ----- If you receive others you also receive me ---- and the one who sent me.

Hospitality is often our very first chance at sharing and living Christ.

Sometimes we only have one chance at it --- so we must be alert and vigilant --- seizing the opportunities as they arise.

“He who receives you receives me --- and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.”

Jesus always welcomed --- received and treated people with the utmost of dignity and respect --- and so ought we to.

People are to identify us with Jesus and Jesus with us.

And so often this begins with hospitality.

Amen.