

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, July 2, 2017  
 The Rev. Ellen Mills  
 St. Thomas Lutheran Church Bloomington, Indiana  
 Matthew 10:40-42 - **Welcomed and Welcoming**

This morning we come to the end of Jesus' instructions to the twelve disciples he is sending out to proclaim the good news and to heal. Jesus is tying the response to these disciples to the response to him and to God. The disciples have been empowered, and they have been connected to God. We don't just respond to God in some **abstract** way. Our response to God is played out in our daily lives, in our response to others. And Jesus implies at the end, that even small acts matter. One of my commentaries tells me that to structure a saying with three things, is to draw attention to the third thing. We have prophets, and then the righteous, and so we are led to expect that the next will somehow be greater. And Jesus highlights the "little ones." In years past I have focused on the ministry of little things. We, individually, cannot solve the problems of the world. We, individually, cannot solve the problems of our community. And since St Thomas is a much larger church than the ones where I served, I will add that it takes far more than the work of a couple of people to be church together. This is something I still believe, and Jesus demonstrated it when he fed a crowd of thousands with a few people's lunches. We are all called to share and give and do what we can, and God will multiply it.

This morning, I also want to read this passage in another translation. *The Message* is a paraphrase in modern idiom, that tries to bridge the gap between the time of Jesus and our time:

*We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God's messenger. Accepting someone's help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing.*

What is the focus here? I think it is not only the power of small things, but it is also **what it does to relationship when we give and when we allow others to give to us.** Small

things can make a difference in a relationship to another person. It can be a gesture of caring and acknowledgement of the value of that person. Does our money help? Yes. Does giving stuff help? Yes. But I'm not sure that gets to the heart of what Jesus is talking about. These disciples are being sent out with nothing, in order that they can accept the hospitality of strangers, and in order that a relationship can be forged. They are being sent out to eat with others, to accept the hospitality of their households. Such actions have a way of affecting both hearts. And when those hearts are open, the disciples would be able to preach and to heal. It is possible to be a giver without ever opening our hearts to the value of the other person. We want to give to feel better, but we aren't always willing to enter into the life of the other. That is not love.

When I lived in Bloomington before, I was at St Thomas long enough to be present when a delegation came from our Sister Parish in Chichipate, and also to hear the reporting back from a couple of our delegations that went there. Chichipate is the best example of hospitality I can offer. The people of Chichipate have so little according to American standards. And they know how to give so much. They live their lives with their hearts open, totally dependent on God. And somehow those who are in that sort of relationship with God are conscious of God's abundance, and they participate. I had an experience of hospitality in France 40 years ago. During the six months of the program, we lived in several different places, and three of those times we lived with French families. It is a great way to learn the language and experience the culture. My experience of hospitality came in a small village in Brittany called La Gascilly. The week we stayed there, we received a welcome out of all proportion to who we were as students. We received the welcome from a community that had experienced few Americans since their liberation at the end of WW2, and who desired to show their gratitude. They had a *fete* for us, and provided us with local food and music, even in Breton, a Gaelic language that is dying out. My other two experiences were quite different. The second family focused on making money off of the arrangement, and the third was a pleasant business arrangement. It was the Bretons who opened their hearts to us.

I was also affected by a class I took in seminary called Social Issues in the Local Parish. It taught me about doing ministry **with** rather than **for**. It did not deny the huge need around us but it looked at ways to be part of a deeper solution rather than a Band-Aid. And the solution included listening to the reality of those in need, and coming up with a plan where we would partner together. We all need to give as well as receive. If we only give, we risk thinking of ourselves as better than those we help. The goal is interdependence. God has given us different gifts, but they are to be shared. There may be times in our lives when we are in a position to share our abundance. There may be times when we are in a situation of needing help. I am going to argue that interdependence is more about attitude than money. In the years I visited the homebound in small towns in Ohio, one situation really stood out for me. An elderly woman and her adult disabled son lived together, dependent on each other. They had built a web of relationships with others who gave and received. There was caring and generosity. Food was given and received. So was transportation. But above all, the giving came from hearts that wanted to be connected with others. They listened to each other's struggles, they prayed for each other, and they cared. It was small, it was informal, and four people managed an existence connected to each other that would have been impossible alone. And it was very real. Their hearts were open to one another.

I suspect we all have a few words to describe what we each think the main "problem" is with society today. And one of the ones I would offer is **disconnection**. We live separate lives. We do not know how other people, even in our community, live. And we are not sure that living disconnected is a problem. We certainly face some problems today that are large and complex and are the results of many situations over many years. And truly it is hard to know what our part is. My concern is that more and more do not believe that they have a part. There appears to be a desire to live without being touched or affected by the suffering of others. That is not Jesus for me. Jesus lived with his heart open, and he sent out his disciples to have open hearts as well. He saw and touched and valued people in his time who were not meant to even be seen: Gentiles, Samaritans, and yes, women. Tax collectors. Children, who were not valued by adults. And those whose

illnesses kept them apart: lepers, the dying, a woman with bleeding, the blind and the deaf. But they did not have to be worthy in the eyes of others to be seen by Jesus. They lived at a time with clear distinctions between classes, between rich and poor, slave and free. It was a culture of honor and shame, and patronage. And then, there was Jesus. He didn't seem to see the lines that had been drawn. He was not naïve; he was just **deeply welcoming**. And he was sending these twelve out to learn how to do it.

I will end with Luther's Small Catechism. Luther had a way of turning the spotlight on our hearts. It is easy for many to hear the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" and feel righteous. But Luther went to the heart of it. "We are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way, but help him in all his physical needs." We are connected to God and our neighbor. We are connected in love, and love is not a feeling. Love is a verb. AMEN