

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:40-42

*<sup>40</sup> “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. <sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”*

This week we are going to continue taking a look at Jesus’ conversation with his disciples in Matthew 10. In Matthew 10, Jesus tells us what he expects of his disciples. His twelve disciples are to carry out their mission to preach and teach and heal. They are to dress simply. They are to expect persecutions by government and family. They are to pick up their crosses and follow Christ. They are to love God more than their family. This was their mission. This is our Christ-directed mission too.

I talked a bit about living missionally and I challenged you to think about what that might look like for you. Living missionally means nurturing your top two relationships with our Creator God and our Savior Jesus Christ, becoming so tight with them that their likeness is reflected in all that we say and do. We are called to share Jesus through our words and actions every single day, no matter where we are or who we are with.

Then we get to our scripture for today which speaks about “Welcoming”. In a sense these verses seem to respond to the previous verses of 34-39 and the recognition that the gospel can and does split families, setting one member over against another. These are not easy words to hear. But what Jesus offers here is a more binding relationship than even the natural family.

Jesus says that as we carry out our mission to take the gospel to the world, we will be rejected by some people but received by others. Jesus indicates there is a process begun when we are welcomed—making a connection between the host (whoever welcomes you), disciples (us), Jesus and God (the one who sends us). Through this identification, the four parties are united, a bond is formed, perhaps one that is even greater than a family bond. The creation of this new family potentially enhances the scope of God’s mission as we work together.

Of course, it’s not always us who needs someone to extend a welcome to us. We also should be willing to welcome others, even those different from us. They may not have anything special about them except that they too are a child of God, and that’s pretty special. They may not seem to know much about God—or even seem all that interested in talking about God—but what they may not realize is that God lurks within them waiting to be discovered by his host. In turn, we may find God revealing himself to us.

Shane Claiborne, who has taken the gospel beyond the streets of Philadelphia to the slums of Calcutta and the war zones of Iraq, describes how God revealed himself through the homeless:

I saw a woman in a crowd as she struggled to get a meal from one of the late-night food vans. When we asked her if the meals were really worth the fight, she said, “Oh yes, but I don’t eat them myself. I get them for another homeless lady – an elderly woman around the corner who can’t fight for a meal.”

I saw a street kid get \$20 panhandling outside of a store and then immediately run inside to share it with his friends. We saw a homeless man lay a pack of cigarettes in the offering plate because it was all he had to give. I saw a blind street musician who was viciously abused by

some young guys who would mock her, curse her, and, one night, sprayed Lysol in her eyes as a practical joke. As we held her that night, one of us said, “There are a lot of bad folks in the world aren’t there?”

She said, “Oh, but there are a lot of good ones too. And the bad ones make you—the good ones—seem even sweeter.”

We met a little girl who was homeless and asked her what she wanted to do when she grew up. “I want to own a grocery store,” she said. We asked her why and she said, “So I can give out food to all of the hungry people.

Mother Teresa used to say, “In the poor we meet Jesus in his most distressing disguises.” Now I know what she meant.

Jesus did say in verse 42, “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” Perhaps a reward we receive sometimes when we welcome anyone, not just the poor but also the shy quiet one, the person with a mental illness, a person with lots of tattoos and piercings, the disabled, our neighborhood youth club children, anyone is that God reveals himself to us through them.

Welcoming is a powerful missional tool that will help start the process I spoke about moments ago; except this time, we are the one doing the welcoming. We must approach the welcome with the right attitude, love and acceptance of a person just for who he/she is, and not with a goal of badgering him/her into submission to our ways and our beliefs. Welcoming does not mean just waiting for someone to come into the church, it may not even involve a come to our church conversation, at least not to start.

Welcoming with a genuine interested and caring heart invites people into relationships with us, with Jesus, and ultimately with God, and then, they too become a part of our family. I’ve been watching that happen as our friends from the Otterbein community have been worshipping with us. We know you are hurting, grieving, perhaps even angry. And while it has been difficult to do much socializing over the last several months because of the pandemic, I hope you sense our care, support, and love for you.

I’ve gotten to know some of you. I don’t know everyone’s name yet, but I’m trying. Please don’t feel insulted if I do not remember your name. Names, learning names is a great welcoming tool. We welcome each other as we learn names.

Let me get to my point about this. I’ve heard that we have Otterbein people and Hagerstown people, and we too often refer to each other that way. I think that needs to go away. It sounds too much like “us and them” description of who we are. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. That’s what the bible tells us. I would like us to work at getting to know one another’s names. Again, I know the pandemic makes that hard, but maybe in the parking lot we could work at it.

I’m not suggesting anyone give up an important part of their identity. I know for some important decisions about the future will need to be made one day, but there’s nothing that says we are not brothers and sisters in Christ, for that’s who we are.

In our welcoming, we should listen to one another’s stories, pray for one another, share God-given ideas and talents, and work together for the building of God’s Kingdom. As God’s family which has no borders, that’s what we do. (Introduce some people)

Jesus tells us to welcome all people, for when we do we welcome him and the one who sent him and send us. Amen.