

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, June 28, 2020

Prelude

Welcome / Call to Worship

Grace and peace to you from United Protestant Church in Morgan Park, Duluth, MN, where the hot and muggy weather has descended upon us.

Let this time of worship be a cool drink of water, a cool breeze, a refreshing dip into cool water for our souls.

Come in. Still your mind and open your heart to welcome God's presence.

Let us share our call to worship:

"Christ Be Our Light" (insert)

Scripture:

Matthew 10:40-42

[Jesus said:] "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 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; 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."

Hymn after Scripture: "O Safe to the Rock That Is Higher than I" (#400)

Sermon:

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." —y'know, I love that, and I was going to preach on that until I read yesterday and had a holy slap upside the head with this other sentence:

"Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward"

We've talked about being disciples, but what about prophets?

Speaking truth to power, seeking to change a destructive course of the people. Are we prophets? That's different.

But there are prophets in our midst. There are people speaking truth to power and seeking a change in the destructive course of the people in many places in our lives. In our world, and in our country, to be sure, but also in communities, in our families, in our church.

I watched a video yesterday, an interview with a doctor famous for his amazing track record of healing people. He shared that his approach is not ostensibly medical, it is spiritual, involving a reconnection with the wholeness of humanity, nature, and God. Ok, roll your eyes. Those are new-age buzz words to be sure. But here they're practical, with a tangible track record.

And of all the things he shared, what has stuck with me was his talk about preset barriers and boundaries, set up by generations long before us, that keep us from realizing our full potential and power to heal.

He said: "We are being kept from that power, so that power can be taken from us and put in the hands of a few."

And this is not just in our own healing, it is in our culture, our country, our families, our world. People have created boundaries that consolidate power into the hands of a very few, and more importantly do not want you to understand, accept, embrace, and utilize your own power. Because then they lose control over you. They lose the consolidation of power—the gluttonous consolidation of power—they seek to have over you, over all.

We see this play out in many ways in the brokenness around us. Think of the conversations we are having these days, where prophets among us are lifting up the powerless and speaking truth to the powerful in an attempt to change the boundaries that have been set up generations before us, that have brought about the destructive course of culture and humanity.

- preset boundaries of how we treat distribution of resources and wealth in humanity.
- preset boundaries of how we treat people of different cultural background or race.
- present boundaries on gender, and sexuality.
- preset boundaries of how we treat the earth, and nature.

Do we understand the preset boundaries, and do we understand what the prophets are saying?

So Jesus the prophet, he knows this and he speaks about this in his own time and place.

These few verses here are the end of his speech to his disciples, but it really began back at the end of chapter nine of Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus has been busy himself traveling all around, healing and teaching.

But isn't it interesting that there seems to be far more emphasis on healing and raising people from a meek and lowly state than on the exact words and teachings the disciples (or for that matter, us) should be using? There is more emphasis, it seems, on the doing than on the saying, more emphasis on doing good than on holding the "correct" beliefs.

Jesus doesn't talk about legalism, not about rule nor regulation or religious or cultural systems and ideology—he talks about healing, and raising—about empowering and lifting up the people beyond their meek and lowly state.

...Because he knows they have the shadow of legalism in their everyday lives, and they live in the shadow of the empire's gluttonous consolidation of power. And all they received from all of that is their present meek and lowly and powerless state.

And here, we read the language shift to "prophet".

"Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward"
Speaking truth to power. Seeking to change a destructive course of the people.

And how does he say it? How does he say we should be prophets? Love the "least" of these.

"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."

But in the "loving the least of these" in the humble act of "giving even the smallest nurture to the little ones", is the shadow of corrupt power, unhealthy barriers, separation between the haves and the have-nots.

And if you are lifting up the little ones, the powerless, you're challenging the systems in place that seek to keep them powerless.

Are we willing to pay the price of challenging the systems in place that keep us from honoring Jesus's call? Or just go through the motions. Maybe... "work in the shadows" a bit, but certainly not "stir the pot."

Scared to "stir the pot?" I get it. Most of us are. It's a lot of work. We face a lot of protest and anger, and ridicule from others not ready or to "stir the pot", or not wanting to because they benefit from the present system.

Indeed, part of this speech from Jesus to his disciples warned us that the same things that happened to Jesus could happen to us. This was the end of last week's Gospel, "take up your cross and follow me"

Be ready, Jesus says, to experience the same resistance I experience, to be called names and to be misinterpreted. Be ready for your life to be threatened.

We are sent by Jesus, who was sent by God, so we're associated with Jesus, identified with him, and granted his authority, but along with the authority comes risk, but

Jesus, interestingly, doesn't speak of intensity or extravagance here, but of just one little cold cup of water. Even that much, he says, will be rewarded.

That is where we begin.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes in "Bread of Angels" that we are not "consumers" but "providers of God's love": we're not supposed to seek a place of safety and reassurance in the church--it's not "a hideout," she says, not "the place where those of us who know the secret password can gather to celebrate our good fortune," and we are not simply "chosen people who have been given more good gifts than we can open at one sitting: healing, forgiveness, restoration, resurrection."

Instead, "the Holy Spirit comes knocking at the door, disturbing our members-only meeting and reminding us that it is time to share."

It begins with one cold cup of water.

Hymn after Sermon: "When Peace Like a River Attendeth" #401

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Lord's Prayer

Closing Hymn: "Great is Thy Faithfulness" (#37)

Benediction

Postlude