

Trinity 3 Zoom 2020

Matthew 10.40-42

Welcome! A word we often use. It was said at the beginning of our worship today. We say it when visitors come to our home. We use it when someone thanks us for something – you're welcome! Doormats have the word printed on them. Cathedrals have it in many languages for visitors to feel welcome. A house near where we used to live had a sign on the front door saying – grandchildren are welcome here.

In today's gospel Jesus uses the word 4 times as he concludes his teaching on mission. He's underlining the close identification between God, himself, those who go in his name, and those who receive his followers in the right spirit.

This is a summing up of his instructions and advice as he sends his disciples out. Whoever welcomes the disciples (and us), welcomes him. A disciple's character, actions and words are to be such that they (and we) can be identified as belonging to Jesus. When Jesus' followers are welcomed, it's Jesus himself

who's welcomed, and his Father who sent him. While a welcome into a home then had a far stronger cultural basis than we may experience today, nevertheless our interactions with others, in any medium or location, should in some way bring Jesus into the encounter.

Hospitality is a characteristic of the Middle East. Among the Jews it's typified by Abraham and Sarah who welcomed three strangers and found they'd welcomed angels. The writer to the Hebrews says – do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for in so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it. For them the meeting of people also involves the shekinah – God's hidden presence.

Jesus' disciples are to go out in God's name. They're to be his representatives, his image, to the world. The Jews believed that receiving a king's envoy was to receive the king. To welcome a messenger of a friend is the same as welcoming the friend.

Giving a cup of cold water to someone who needs it isn't going to make headlines. Most likely, only the giver and the receiver will be aware of it. Yet, Jesus holds up this small act as having eternal consequences. This giving of water stands for any number of small acts of kindness which give life to others.

During this lockdown many people have metaphorically been given cups of water. Locally by the Scouts, the Witney Land Army, friends, family, people from our congregations etc. In all sorts of ways people are giving the equivalent to those who need it. And then parents do it for their children every day of the week. Neighbours do as much for each other, young people for those who have less energy than themselves, carers for those in their care.

We can all think of people who've shown us hospitality. Such hospitality may have taken a variety of forms, apart from food, or a bed for the night. Those who make us feel at home when we move into a new situation, whether it's a new location, a new job, or a new responsibility. Those hospitable towards us when we need a listening ear. Such welcoming responses are

all expressions of the giving of the cup of water. Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve, was himself appreciative of this from others. In the heat of the mid-day sun he asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. He welcomed the hospitality of people like Mary and Martha. He found momentary relief when Simon of Cyrene helped him carry his cross.

The way we relate to one another is an expression of how we relate to God, whether we're aware of it or not. Life isn't divided into secular and sacred areas, the secular area being where we live, work and play, and the sacred where we pray and worship. The secular is full of the sacred. In our dealings with other people we're dealing with the divine. We stand on holy ground all the time.

Jesus asserts that when hospitality is shown to others there's more going on than we might realise. He states: Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and those who welcome me, welcome the one who sent me. The Greek word 'welcome' can be translated as 'receive', and the Amplified Bible expands the one Greek word as 'receives and welcomes and accepts'.

Oscar Wilde's *Selfish Giant* banned the children from his garden. He built a wall round it and put up a notice saying; Trespassers will be Prosecuted. He didn't receive, welcome or accept. From that time spring didn't come to his garden. By keeping himself to himself and not welcoming anyone, least of all children, the garden stayed in winter.

Only when the children sneaked back did the spring return. Then the giant realised his hostility and lack of welcome had kept him in the cold.

Hostility brings isolation. Hospitality opens us to the warmth of love.

Jesus also stresses the importance of 'going out', of interacting with others. He refers to 'whoever welcomes you'. In what sense do we 'go in the name of Jesus'? Perhaps a bit more difficult than usual currently. But in all our communications, is Jesus reflected in us, in our words and actions, or do we need specifically to say who we are? A country's new ambassador, meeting the Queen for the first time, will always offer her their 'credentials' – assuring her she can trust them to speak on behalf of those who sent them. What credentials can we offer

to show we're sent by Jesus? And what effect do they have on us?

These words were shared by one of Joanna's oldest friends as a reflection on today's Gospel:

Not just in broken bread
And wine poured out,
Do we meet our Lord
In space and time....
But in his little ones received,
In strangers loved,
The needy served,
And in cups of water in his name,
Our thirst is quenched
Our hunger satisfied