

“Whoever Welcomes....”

Matthew 10: 40-42

Our text this morning seems simple enough. Just two lines that begin with “Whoever welcomes you Welcomes me.” Seems easy enough. Seems pretty self explanatory. It seems as if Jesus is telling his disciples to welcome others in his name and calling us as his modern day disciples to do the same. Once again, seems easy enough ..except when it isn’t.

The funny thing about these two simple lines is that they are a part of a wider section. They are the ending lines to the story of where Jesus sends out his disciples to go and do ministry in his name. These two lines are really instructions and reminders to the disciples that when they go out as his disciples, they are supposed to lower their barriers and personal walls and really allow others to welcome them as his disciples in Jesus’ name.

And that puts a whole new spin on this text and that’s why this simple little text is more complex, more complicated, and more challenging than we realized at first glance. To our eyes and to our understanding, we think this text is calling us to welcome others. We think this text is calling us to embrace others as we would embrace Jesus.

And on one level this is true. This is exactly what Jesus wants us to do as his disciples: welcome as he welcomed, love as he loved, minister to others as he ministers to the people of God. When we hear the word welcome in this text and in other places in our lives, we hear and understand it to mean We give and others receive. We hear and understand it to mean We give and others accept. We hear and understand it to mean We give and others get.

But the wonderful thing about this text is that Jesus is asking us to listen a bit more closely to the words that he is actually saying to his disciples. Jesus is just vague enough in his wording of this simple little text that it can also be interpreted that as Jesus' disciples, we must be willing to receive that very same welcome in our hearts and into our lives that we gave out, that we shared, that we bestowed upon others. And that's where it gets hard. That's the part we don't really like because we know that when we are asked to receive, we give up a little bit of the control. We become a little vulnerable. We let down our personal walls and let others in. When we are asked to receive, we hear and understand the word Welcome to mean that We have to let go of the illusion that we have everything figured out, that We have to let go of the appearance that we are strong enough for the journey. And that makes us uncomfortable. That pushes us out of comfort zone a little too much for our liking. That feeling of vulnerability puts us into some new territory that we are not sure we are really ready to explore.

But that's exactly why Jesus does it. The reason why Jesus adds this bit of text to his instructions to his disciples is because Jesus knows that the easy part is the welcoming of others, the inviting of others to the table; the giving out the peace of the Kingdom to others. That's the easy part. That's the part we are able to do well. That's the part the disciples saw Jesus do while he was teaching, preaching, and healing during his time here on earth. That's why this part of discipleship came easy for the disciples and for us today as modern day disciples of Christ. Jesus knows that we as his disciples can do the giving that goes along with the welcoming. He knows that we have all been taught and try to live by the words of wisdom: It is better to give than receive.

But where's the fun in that? Where is the healing in that? How does ministry happen when we really know the needs of the people? And how can we truly become disciples when we won't or can't acknowledge our own hurts, our own wounds, our own vulnerabilities, or our own pain?

That's why Jesus takes the instructions one step further. Jesus knows and wants the disciples to understand that discipleship is more than just the giving part. It is about receiving as well. It is about embracing fully the experience that grace, love and welcome are gifts given to this world because God loved us and welcomed us in the first place. Jesus wants the disciples to understand that Discipleship is about the acceptance that we didn't do anything to earn these gifts.

God gave them to us as gifts, freely no strings attached. And Jesus also wants the disciples to experience the first steps to truly becoming his disciple by accepting these gifts with their whole hearts, no ifs ands or buts, accepting God's love and God's grace into their lives fully with no limits, accepting God's call and God's welcome into their hearts, no restrictions and no boundaries on exactly how far they will allow God to enter into our lives.

Jesus gives these instructions to challenge his disciples to become vulnerable, to put down their barriers and walls and really allow that other person to come into their hearts and into their lives. And that's the same challenge that he extends to us today. Because Jesus wants us to understand and to experience the knowledge that if we have never truly been welcomed or embraced, than how can we truly welcome and embrace others as God's very own. Jesus wants the disciples to really experience the welcome of God and others to be more than a feel good sort of thing. He wants the disciples to really experience what it feels like for someone other than themselves to really tend to their needs, to really minister to them as children of God, to really see them as the people God created them to be. And for that to happen, the disciples must allow themselves to be vulnerable and allow others to welcome them in Jesus' name.

Jesus doesn't ask this lightly of the disciples. He doesn't ask them to do this because it is the right thing to do. He doesn't ask them to become vulnerable

because they will become better people. No, Jesus asks this of his disciples because he knows that when we really allow ourselves to be welcomed by others, there's a beginning of a relationship. And that's the beginning of healing and reconciling the Body of Christ here on earth.

Relationships take time. Relationships take effort. Relationships take more than a surface interaction. Relationships require that we really get to know the other person, that we really see that other person for who he or she really is, that we really seek healing for the real needs that are preventing us from becoming the people that God created us to be.

And Jesus tells us that this welcoming by others can be as simple as receiving a cup of water, as simple as receiving friendly hello, or as simple as receiving the invitation to come to the table, just as we are, to break bread together as one Body, one faith, one Lord, one community here on earth. And in return, we will share these rewards of grace, of love, of well-being with others because we are now able to understand that the Welcome of God is not a simple, surface only, feel good moment. We now understand that the Welcome of God is really about our well being as ones claimed and named as God's own. The Welcome of God is really an invitation for all to come and be made well, to come and be healed, to come and be made whole.

And that's the good news that this text brings to us this morning. That when we allow ourselves to be welcomed in Jesus' name, we are invited to truly experience the opportunity to be made whole through God's grace and God's love, gifts freely given to all of God's children, gifts freely given with nothing expected in return, gifts freely given because our God first loved us and claimed us as God's own.