

Sermon Proper 8
Second Sunday After Pentecost Year A
June 26, 2011

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." This sounds like a pretty simple, straightforward statement, but have you ever really stopped to think about it? When you welcome a disciple of Christ, that would be anyone who spreads the Good News of the Gospel, that would be us, you welcome Christ. And not only Christ, but the one who sent Christ... that would be God.

Not such a simple statement... Pretty profound. Then Jesus continues... "Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward;" First of all, what is a Prophet? A prophet is not just someone who predicts future events. A prophet is also a teacher, a spreader of God's word; a preacher of the Good News of the Gospel.

The Diaconate is said to be a prophetic order...we are to keep our finger on the pulse of the community. Find out what is needed... where there is hurt... where there is hunger... where there is despair... and then bring those needs back to the church so they can be met by God's people... That would be us.

And, What is a prophet's reward? A prophet is rewarded by a closeness to God that most of us do not seek. They listen to God's voice and react by answering God's call. Therefore they live a life that is rich in love, and fellowship, and laughter and pain. They are rewarded with a heart that is full to bursting with the love of God, and the knowledge that they have answered God's call on their lives. And, every time we welcome a prophet we receive the gifts of a prophet... the gift of their stories, the gift of God's word, and the gift of knowing that having welcomed one of God's prophet's, we have welcomed Jesus himself... into our homes... into our lives... into our hearts. And not only have we welcomed Jesus, but the one who sent Him... that would be God.

Then we come to a righteous person... "whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous". We all pretty much know what it takes to be a righteous person. A righteous person is virtuous, moral, just, upright, honorable, honest, respectable, decent... and as for the rewards of a righteous person... Paul tells us just how great the reward is for being righteous in today's readings...

“... now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life.” Eternal life, through Jesus Christ and the one who sent him... that would be God. And then, as Jesus likes to do, he saves the best for last... “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.”

Dr. Anna Carter Florence, Professor of Preaching and Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary, and a frequent speaker at the Homiletics’ festival, tells a story about not only giving someone a cup, but how they give it to them. She said that in Atlanta, there are many places that provide meals to those that so desperately need them. Many of them have large assembly line buffets, where the servers are on one side of the counter and the people, with their plates, are on the other side. Rarely is there any exchange between the two and often the only contact is the spoon placing the food on the plate. But, there is one place there that gives out 160 tickets at 6 a.m. for those who want breakfast. They then call out the number of each ticket and the person holding that ticket takes a seat at one of the places laid at the numerous tables. Instead of a buffet line, the eggs, toast, orange juice and coffee are brought to the table.

There are always seconds, and thirds if they are wanted, and no one is rushed or hurried along; there is always time to linger over conversation and a second or third cup of coffee. Because the same people often show up, the workers get to know the people they serve and the people get to know the workers and a community is formed where people know and care what happens to one another. The people that run this place have decided that it is better to serve a smaller number around a table than to serve a thousand people in a line.

As they welcome these people in for breakfast, they welcome Jesus in for breakfast. What would it look like if we were to have Jesus in for breakfast? Would it be elaborate? Would we be intimidated and running around to be sure everything was perfect for Him, or would it be a simple meal with time to linger over conversation and coffee?

Why not ask ourselves this question? Because when we welcome someone in that needs breakfast, we welcome Jesus in, and when we welcome Jesus in, we welcome in the one who sent him... and that would be God.

Today we will be baptizing young Maddie Murphy and welcoming her into our community of faith. Her parents and godparents will promise to see her raised with the love of Christ in her life. They will welcome Jesus into her life, to walk beside her and to remain with her for the rest of her life. And when they

welcome Jesus into her life, they will also welcome into her life the one who sent Him ...and that would be God.

Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, paraphrases this Gospel like this: “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.”