

2 Matt 10:40-42 Pent gracious people-generous people.

“Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me.” “And whoever gives even a cup of water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward. Jesus uses this term, “little ones” especially in the later writings to include new disciples. We know about prophets-those whom speak for God, and we are familiar with the term “righteous ones”; people who are mature in their faith.

Some things may seem rather obvious. Like reading the fine print on a bottle of sleeping pills that reads: ***May cause drowsiness and so we also*** might wonder why Jesus has to tell us to be kind to little children. Well, the alarming statistics about child abuse in this country would indicate that there are a large number of people who do indeed need to be warned and reminded about that. But, ordinary kindness and generosity to little children is only a part of what Jesus is getting at here. There is a much more complex meaning in these three short verses.

The text comes at the end of a sequence in Matthew's gospel in which Jesus has been preparing his disciples to go out into the world to preach the Kingdom. He is telling them how to respond to the variety of ways their efforts will be received.

When he says, ***whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me*** Jesus is drawing line from the disciples through himself to the creator God. To welcome a disciple is the same as welcoming God into your home. This is a twofold promise. On the one hand it reminds the disciples to be humble about the reception they receive, for that welcome is not for them, it is for God.

On the other hand, it reminds them that they do not go out representing themselves and their own wisdom and power; they go out representing God. We all need to remember this as we go about our business of being Christians, disciples of Jesus in the world. It is not about us, it is about God.

The smallest acts of kindness are to be rewarded by God. Think of that when you are overwhelmed by all that God has asked us to do in order to be disciples, in order to be witnesses for Jesus, in order to be good Christians. Mother Teresa said to do small things for people. Let me remind you, that doing a small thing, being gracious, can perhaps be the biggest gift that you can give to a person. It can be a gift that can change their whole life. It can heal them, it can resurrect their spirit, it can raise them

from the dead—the place of unfeeling, the place of depression, the place of hopelessness, the place where God is not—or so they think.

You know that words can be harmful or helpful, that they can tear us down or build us up. You've experienced this in the words others have spoken to you – and you've observed the powerful effect your words can have on others. You are not surprised that the Scriptures call us to speak in ways that are life-giving, not death-dealing. “Let your speech always be gracious,” says St. Paul (Col. 4:6).

You, by your act of graciousness, can bring people back to life, to joy, to God. Yes, it does require something from you, but it is not something that you can't afford to give up. And, no, it may not even include your material wealth, although sometimes it does—that extra can of food, that five dollars to the girl or boy scouts who come knocking at your door, that, well you know, all the monetary things.

We've gotten used to the idea of honoring those people who are considered to be important. But when Jesus switches to talking about children after making the disciples feel important, we get the message of Jesus, the message of the Kingdom of God.

This Gospel message is one of reversal, of upside down and sideways values.

Those who are seen by the world to be on top are known to really be on the bottom, and those on the bottom are esteemed by God as the most important of all. In this little text Jesus subtly moves the disciples through a sequence that leads them away from thinking about how important they are to thinking about how they can serve the least important people in the world in the name of Jesus.

A child can do no work, a child can't vote, a child has no wisdom or prestige or significance to share. To the ancient world, most children were nothing more than a nuisance, another mouth to feed, another brat under foot until they became old enough to work at the age of 5 or 6.

So when Jesus bestows upon them the same value as disciples and prophets and righteous persons, the same value as himself and God; when Jesus does *this* he is doing an incredibly radical and unheard of thing.

And it is just this sort of radical and unheard of thing to which we modern day, 21st century prophets and persons who aspire to be righteous, have been called.

We have been called to go out in the name of Jesus C to share our stuff and God's love with those whom the world rejects and turns its back

on. We have been called to give radical hospitality to people who keep failing in life and to those unable to work and take care of themselves.

We have been called to look at people not with our own eyes but with the eyes of Christ. We have been called to love the loveless with the heart of Christ which overflows with love for all.

We have been called to care for others whether they deserve it or not; because none of us is disciplined and righteous and prophetic enough to deserve the love of God; it has been given to us as a gift, and we are called to give it to others free of charge and free of judgment.

Yes, we have been called to the ministry of welcoming and receiving and giving and loving and the only question left is, "How will we answer that call?"