

Understanding One Another: A Cold Cup of Water

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost, Year A ~ Matthew 10:40-42

Welborne UMC ~ July 2, 2017

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Last Sunday night was our ice cream and kickball even and about 3 dozen of us gathered on the fields behind the Tuckahoe Y for a great evening. The first kickball game was adults versus kids—and when we divided up the adults were pretty sure we were going to take a beating. We were surprised to be wrong, and after a couple of quick innings we stopped for a water break and to redistribute our teams.

I was surprised when I poured myself a cup of water and put it to my lips and it was not cold. I had brought the water cooler over from church with tap water in it, planning to tell folks to put some ice in the cooler. In the flurry of getting there, I had forgotten to do that. The water wasn't hot, but it wasn't that cold water that is, for many, so refreshing on a hot, humid day.

Jesus talks about that cup of cold water in our scripture lesson today. He is wrapping up a lengthy sermon to his disciples about the task of discipleship, and he ends by saying that it is important to give a cup of cold water to the "little ones." Let's unpack what he means by that.

If we think about the geography of the Middle East, we know that it is an arid place. Survival in the ancient world was dependent on finding and sharing water. In addition, there were many cultural rules about sharing water. As one commentator writes, "A household was obligated to offer any visitor or traveler, known or a stranger, food and water.....Not to offer hospitality was dishonorable."¹

So offering a cup of cold water to anyone in need was a basic practice of Middle Eastern culture in Jesus day. So he is placing the practice of hospitality in the context of his culture. What does he mean by "the little ones," though? Before we are quick to limit this to fledgling disciples, remember that in this same Gospel, later in the 25th chapter, Jesus is clear that whenever we serve anyone—the least of these among us—we are serving him.

Our task as we engage the Word today is to think not just about how it applied to the ancient world, but how it applies to us today. Today, while clean water is not available everywhere in our world, we are privileged enough to generally take for granted that cold water is accessible in our homes, neighborhoods and community. Offering it to one another is not an act of radical hospitality.

¹ Seasons of the Spirit Congregational Life Resources for July 2, 2017, Copyright 2016 Wood Lake Publishing, p. 64.

However, we find in our culture an incredible undertone of hostility toward the other—toward people who do not look, think or act like us. This, I believe, is one of the barriers Jesus invites us to cross. In our particular context here at Welborne, we live in a community where within the radius of just a couple of miles, people live who practice very different faiths. We live in a neighborhood with Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Coptic, Hindu and other neighbors. And I will confess to you that the only one of these “other” neighbors I talked to this week is the one with whom we have an established relationship—the Coptic community. I would guess that you join me in the relative isolation I have from friendships with people of other faiths.

It is that need to break through our isolation that draws us to this worship series this summer, Understanding One Another. The purpose of this series is to establish a foundation for relationships with people of other faiths. Our goal is to think these next several weeks about the common threads we have with other faiths. What are the shared values between Christianity and Islam? Christianity and Hinduism? Christianity and Judaism? Christianity and Atheism? We will be exploring this in worship, and I also want to invite all adults and youth to join our small group on these topics at 9:30 each week.

I believe we must begin by understanding one another—the perspectives and beliefs that ground our world views. From this place of understanding, we can come to a place of listening, and then to a place of working together in our communities, across the boundaries of belief. This is a process which is critical in our broken and divided American culture, as well as in our global community.

Just two weeks ago, the Elijah Interfaith Institute brought prominent religious leaders across the world together to launch the Make Friends Initiative, stressing that friendships with one another are an antidote to negativity and division in our world. I can assure you that I had no idea this project was under way, but when I heard about it, I received it as a strong movement of the Spirit that what we are about here at Welborne to make friends in our community is what God would have us be about. I invite you to hear these leaders’ message as we move in to our time of response.

[Make Friends video <http://www.elijah-interfaith.org>]

Today, I invite you to begin a process of making friends, of understanding one another. That begins with listening to the world around you—who do you see in your daily life that is different? Begin to watch and observe closely, and pray about with whom Jesus might be inviting you to make friends.