Sermon by Synod Minister Heather Culuris   *June, 2023*

Gospel: Matthew 10:40-42

When Jesus sends his disciples out as missionaries, he warns them of persecution and hardships they will face. He also promises to reward any who aid his followers and support their ministry.

[Jesus said to the twelve:] [40]"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. [41]Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; [42]and 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."

One day, as I was driving the open roads of Western Minnesota, I was listening to the radio and happened to stumble upon an interview with Will Guidara, a restaurant owner, who wrote the book Unreasonable Hospitality. It was a fascinating interview about what makes people feel welcome, what makes people feel like they belong, what makes people connect to an experience and each other. I listened to the interview. Then I ordered and read the book, pondering what hospitality can look like not only in restaurants, but in our homes and our schools, our communities and our churches. While the interview was about the restaurant business, hospitality

is also an essential part of our lives of faith, as we heard in our Gospel reading this morning.

Jesus says: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and 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."

As we hear Jesus' words this morning about welcome and acts of hospitality that are as simple as giving someone a drink of water, let's take time to consider the welcome and hospitality that we have seen and received in our own lives. What makes you feel welcome when you visit a new congregation? What makes you feel welcome when you visit someone's home? Perhaps it is a simple smile that lets you know that you are welcome and valued there. It might be a spoken greeting, a "Hello" or a "It's so GOOD to see you!" that tells you that you are welcome. Someone might hold the

door for you or ask you if you need anything. Perhaps you feel welcome and at home when someone offers you a cup of coffee and a brownie or they invite you to sit in their special comfortable chair.

Hospitality is an important part of our lives as Christians and in our congregations. How we welcome one another matters. How we welcome those who are visiting for the first-time matters. How we reach out in our community to those looking for a place to belong matters. Our words, our actions, our hospitality matters to the people we encounter but also to God.

Hospitality is a common theme in the Bible. In the Old Testament, we have the example of Abraham who sets a feast to welcome his heavenly visitors. Then in the New Testament, 1st Peter in Chapter 4 says: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." Paul's letter to the Romans in the 12th chapter reminds us: "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." A few chapters later, Paul continues to remind the Romans: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed

you, for the glory of God" The book of Hebrews is also clear: "Do not forget to show **hospitality** to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown **hospitality** to angels without knowing it." Our Biblical witness reminds us over and over that welcome and hospitality and welcome are parts of a living Christian faith.

In the early years of the church as Christian communities and monasteries were being built, the early religious communities like the Benedictines focused on prayer and work and also hospitality.   Many of the monasteries served as resting places for travelers or places of healing for those who were ill or injured. Over time, this became part of their written order of life together as the Rule of St. Benedict says: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matt 25:35)." To welcome others as Christ became a core faith practice and value for generations and generations of Christians.

This morning, we heard Jesus say: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever

welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's

reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a

righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and 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."

Over 2000 years later, we as Christians continue to consider what these

words from Jesus and the Biblical witness mean for our own lives, our own

faith, our own congregations. Our words, our actions, our hospitality matters

to the people we encounter but also to God.   This summer, as you are out

and about perhaps at family gatherings like weddings and reunions,

graduations and other celebrations, consider ways to live out welcome and

hospitality in your own life. Practice hospitality, showing hospitality to those

you love and those you barely know. Then consider your own

congregation. How do you show hospitality to one another? How do you

show hospitality to your neighbor who nervously visits for Vacation Bible

School Sunday? How do you show hospitality to the person looking and

longing for a place they can belong? This summer, practice hospitality. In

your words and in your actions, show hospitality to strangers and you may

entertain angels without knowing it.