

Christ Episcopal Church | Valdosta, GA
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost | June 28, 2026
The Rev'd Walter Hobgood

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

When I was young, a long time ago, maybe six years old, I used to go with my father daily as he walked the cotton fields on our farm. We were looking for, I should say, he was looking for, weeds, insects, disease damage, drought, all the things that will make a good cotton crop. At that age, I was simply trying to keep up with him. I'd try to step in his footprints that he left in the dirt, but my legs were a little too short to do this. So often you would see the imprints of his boots followed by the imprints of my little bare feet because I really didn't like to wear shoes. Daddy was my hero and still is. I wanted to go everywhere he went. I wanted to be like him.

That imagery, I can imagine, is what walking in the footsteps of Jesus is like. No matter how hard you try, you can't quite get there. Yet this is what the disciples were called to do, to go out into the world and follow in his footsteps.

As modern-day disciples, we're called to do the same thing. Our Gospel readings since Pentecost have challenged us to think about mission, our personal mission and our church's mission. What is God calling us to do? We've received the Holy Spirit. And now the question is, how do we move into the world to help bring about Christ's kingdom? This is our third week in Matthew's tenth chapter where we have been reminded to follow the apostles into the world, to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, to move in the fields ready for harvest. Jesus warns, though, that it won't be easy. that there will be those who are threatened by what we say and do. Today's Gospel reading, however, focuses on welcoming. Jesus uses the word "welcome" six times in this brief passage of only three verses and points us to the importance of hospitality in furthering God's kingdom. We come to realize that our welcoming does not need to consist of large heroic acts. Any simple basic acts of kindness we offer as genuine welcome for one another are all that God requires of us.

All we need to do is look around to see. To see who is in need and try to do something about it. Jesus reminds us that the way we would treat those who are most vulnerable among us is ultimately representative of our response toward God. Jesus refers to these vulnerable ones with whom he identifies as the least. Matthew's Gospel as a whole reminds us that righteousness goes well beyond our relationship with God. Whether we are deemed righteous has a great deal to do with how hospitable we are toward one another, especially those that we meet that are vulnerable.

Members of early Christian communities were called little ones. You heard Jesus say this in the reading today. And regardless of their origin, the disciples of Jesus were encouraged to identify with them and with the little ones in the world. who in turn are called to serve other little ones. When we love the little ones, we love Jesus. In welcoming one another into our hearts, Jesus tells us that we are welcoming him into our hearts, and we're welcoming God into our hearts.

It's the old paradox that it is in giving that you receive. It is in giving that you receive. It is in losing your life that you find it. It is in welcoming others that you experience Jesus' welcome. It is the small acts of devotion, tenderness, and forgiveness that go largely unnoticed, but strengthen the relationships that are most important to us.

Gestures like making a phone call to ask how a friend or stranger is doing, dropping off groceries for the elderly, reaching out to the lonely and the most vulnerable among us. A cup of cold water is the smallest gift, a gift that almost anyone can give. But a cup of cold water is precious to a person that's really thirsty. And in some instances, It's the gift of life. In the kingdom of God, the smallest service brings with it eternal reward for the giver. The cup of cold water is the symbol of that. It doesn't take much to be hospitable, welcoming, and accepting of other people. A cup of cold water replicated a host of times is simple, small deeds. And Jesus tells us that every single one of these small deeds is important, even eternally important. We can find God in each of these smallest good deeds.

The roles of those who we welcome and those being welcomed are interchangeable. We're all called to be Christ to each other. Jesus sends us to share the good news, alleviate human suffering, to meet real needs, to work miracles of love and healing through the acts of kindness through a cup of cold water. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water will most definitely not lose their reward.

Over the years, I've often asked myself this question, how can I follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Let me share a few thoughts. First, I have certain gifts, talents, if you will, and resources. They're unique to me. I can use those resources to fulfill what God is calling me to do. but those are the only talents and resources I have. It's the ones that God has given me. My challenge is to use those talents to the best of my ability to serve God and God's people. Second, my talents are necessary to accomplish what God would have me do, but they're not sufficient to serve all the needs of God's people. Jesus called his disciples and each one of them was different. Each one was unique. Each had different talents. Each had different gifts. They had different backgrounds and different parents. They looked sort of like a church, right?

Like the disciples, we are unique individuals with unique sets of gifts. Working together, we can more fully follow in the footsteps of Jesus better than any one of us can do by ourselves. I came to realize that I can best follow in the footsteps of Jesus when I collaborate with others, when I share my gifts with others, and when I appreciate and respect the gifts of others as well. Together we can heal the sick, we can house the homeless. We can feed the hungry. We can welcome the stranger. Together, we can do the little things that matter. And in the process, take bigger steps.

In His holy name. Amen.