

Discipleship: Ministry to the Least

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Pentecost Litany based on Psalm 8

Leader: When I look at your heavens,

All: the work of your fingers,

Leader: the moon and the stars,

All: which you have set in place,

Leader: what is man that you are mindful of him,

All: and the son of man that you care for him?

Leader: We worship you, Lord, In the name of the Father and The Son and The Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 28:5-9 ⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord, ⁶and the prophet Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. ⁷Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.”

Matthew 10:34-42 ³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶And

a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴²And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

Whoever receives you receives me... – Matthew 10:40

The 2018 volunteer of the year was one of our newest members. We don't actually have a volunteer of the year but that was my joke with Darelene. She and some good friends/neighbors had reconnected with church through Alpha. They provided meals for our Alpha class the second year. They attended all the classes again and invited more friends. Really anything to do with the hospitality team or the kitchen they were eager to help. Coffee on Sunday morning, desserts for a funeral, OWLS and Lenten soup suppers.

Darlene also has a heart for the home bound in the congregation. When we asked for volunteers to deliver the alter flowers to people in the hospital or assisted living she was one of the volunteers. Each Sunday after church she would check in with Pr. Dave and I and if the flowers were not going

home with the family who donated them she had a list of people to deliver them too. At first, she would just deliver the flowers. But then she felt like she should offer more. We talked about how her presence and any word of comfort that she spoke in that time was like a message from God. A very clear message of love and concern. After she delivered those flowers there was a lasting reminder of how God and the church cared for that person.

But, Darlene felt called to more. She wanted to pray with the people she visited. We started with the Lord's prayer. I remember the light in her eyes as she described the courage it took to ask if she could pray and then to just remember the Lord's prayer... which she didn't. The person she was visiting had to help her finish, but the conversation that followed was life-giving and joyful.

Then came the faithful day when she came into Alpha class beaming ready to tell the story of prayer. She had been given enough courage to ask how she could pray for the other person. And then she did it! She prayed out loud without a script, not knowing what the next words that came out of her mouth might be. She was overjoyed to experience the presence of Christ working through her to care for the least of these.

Whoever receives you receives me... – Matthew 10:40

This is one of the shortest promises in the Bible. Jesus goes on to describe what it looks like to hear a promise and receive the gift of faith. Jesus goes on to describe how that faith is counted to us as righteousness (vs. 41).

...whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” – Matthew 10:42

This is God’s promise. You will minister to the little ones. The young and impressionable, the needy and home bound. The least of these.

This is your ministry. God has called you to have a heart for the least of these... God has given you the ability to see those most in need. Those who long to receive your visit of presence and hope.

And those who want nothing to do with you and your talk of God. You are able to see through the negative thoughts and actions of others ...seeing instead the need for love and hope. A phone call or a text.

And when that resistant one - responds even in the least of ways, the slightest acknowledgment, they have been changed by God. They will not lose their reward.

For some of us this is who we are. Our heart goes out to the little child just discovering their faith. Children’s ministry is your niche. For others it is the teenager’s rebellion that calls you to care and compassion. Student ministry is your niche. And you have a wonderful team of volunteers, families and church staff ready to support that ministry God has called you to. For the sake of your children and their friends. This is your discipleship.

God promises that the kids and teenagers in your life will receive the Gospel through you... in some cases... if not you then who?

This is your ministry. Your Discipleship. For some of us who have cared for a parent or friend nearing the end of life we know how lifegiving it is to be that regular presence and reminder of God's care and faithfulness.

The Lay Ministry team is your niche. The Lay Ministry team is one of the most important in the church. This is the team who hires and cares for the staff of the church. This team also manages the volunteers who are needed to make worship happen each week. The communion servers and the Sacristy. The Ushers and Readers.

And our pastoral care is supported by this team. The members of our Pastoral care team are an extension of the Lay Ministry team. This team gets regular reports on the visits and phone calls, and prayer concerns among the church family.

Some members of this team write cards, others make phone calls. Some make visits to deliver flowers, the daily devotionals or communion. This is the team that shows up to show God's love.

Whoever receives you receives me... – Matthew 10:40

Who are the least of these in your life?

God has promised to speak a word of hope and love, something as simple as a prayer, a card or a visit... through you to others. When they receive you they receive the Hope of Christ. You bring the Kingdom. You are the church. God's promise for the little ones, the least.

When have you been the least. The one in need of prayer. In need of a word of hope? What part of you is the least worthy of God's love and attention?

God has promised you a preacher, a prophet... to bear his voice, his image into the hardest of situations.

When Jesus says, *...whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* (Matthew 10:36). This is not a question on a math test. Jesus is not challenging your worthiness. He already is well aware of how worthy any one of us are.

If you have ever felt unworthy of receiving God, you are not the only one. If you have ever felt unqualified to be the one who speaks a word of hope, you are not the only one. If you have ever doubted your ability to pray for another, you are not the only one.

The irony is that none of us are worthy of God's forgiveness. It is not something that can be earned. It is a gift, given at great cost to the heart of God. God loved you enough to give His only Son. When Jesus died on the cross, he exchanged His worthiness for our best attempts and outright rebellion.

The heart of Jesus message is that in your unworthiness someone else took up a cross for your sake. You have been set free from worrying about your qualifications. You have been set free to see the least in yourself and others. It is in the midst of our unworthiness that forgiveness is actually felt and received in a way that changes our hearts.

We love because he First loved us. Because of Jesus who ever receives you has received Christ Himself.

And here is the most interesting part of this promise from God. When we read it quickly we put the emphasis on ourselves.

whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” – Matthew 10:41

However, the little one Jesus is describing is the least in us who bear God’s image. The smallest of gesture for a friend in the hospital or the child in our prayers, brings the presence of Christ.

When the person you are ministering to - responds even in the least of ways, the slightest acknowledgment, ... because of your discipleship - they have been changed by God. They will not lose their reward. (Matthew 10:42)

When the person we visit helps us finish the Lord’s prayer... Christ and his Kingdom have been received.

Whoever receives you receives me... – Matthew 10:40



*The Consultation, Harry Anderson