

Cup of Cold Water  
Sermon by Pastor Heather Feltman  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Charles  
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To better understand today's gospel, let me share a few brief things. Chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel is a commissioning speech that Jesus makes to his disciples. Jesus has finished a series of teachings about what it means to be a follower of Jesus and now he is sending them out to do this work themselves.

The 3 verses we hear today are the last verses of this commissioning. So, as we think about what Jesus words mean for us today, let me share a couple of stories.

I want to start with the disciples:

Here is a group of guys... and in all candor we get the impression they are not much to write home about. Most of them are 'underemployed' as we would say in today's terms—one of them goes door to door collecting tax money, and one of them—well, no one is quite sure whether he can be trusted at all!

So here they are—they fish and collect money each day – and it is a lot like the day before, and the day before that...until....

Until one day this man comes to see them. They have heard about him. He has been hanging around town. He is smart, he talks about things in a different way. He gives people hope about the future. And this man, he comes to see them. And he acts as if he knows them already. And he just looks at them as says, "follow me."

Because this man sees something in each of them. Something others have missed. Something that they themselves have not realized. He sees potential for what each of them can be. He sees them not for who they are at that exact moment, but for who they will become.

So, he gathers this group of guys together, he teaches them everything he knows. He heals, preaches, performs miracles. He shows them a worldview they have never seen before. He talks about hope.

And if that's not enough...amidst the miracles and the teaching and instruction, he makes the audacious decision to actually commission these guys to go out and do the same things he is doing! To heal, to teach, to share the good news and to do so with authority. He tells them how hard it will be, he tells them that it will mean leaving much of the life they know behind, but he also tells them that they can do this.

He gives their lives purpose, he gives their lives a new meaning, and he helps them to see what they can become and sets them on a new path. And when people receive them on their journey, into their homes, they will be Christ to these people. That when people meet them, see them, receive them, they will meet and see and receive Christ! People will see them, and they will see God!

And this disheveled group of guys says YES to all of it! They say "yes" they will do it. And they change the very future of the world by doing so!

Here is the second story I want to share with you:

Jason is the oldest of 5 children. His mother, a single mother, didn't have much money or other resources but she loves her children. And when Jason went to

school he struggled. He didn't like reading, he really struggled with it. He often found himself in trouble and staying focused on school and his future. He was the oldest of 5 children. He didn't like reading, he struggled with it. He often found himself in trouble and staying focused on school and his future was often the last of his priorities.

But then there came a person who saw something different in Jason, something that others might have missed. Something that this young man might not have even realized. This person saw the potential for what Jason could be. This person saw him not for who he was at that exact moment but for who he would become.

And things began to change. Reading still wasn't easy, but it got better. With a lot of hard work and the help of this person and others who believed in him, Jason graduated from High School and was accepted to Boston University – Jason began to discover a different trajectory for his life. Along this journey, Jason's faith in Jesus was reawakened and through all the hardship began to understand a greater purpose for his own life and what he could do. Not only does Jason read now, and for pleasure, he writes poetry and he now teaches at a middle school out East. Jason now has the opportunity to work with incredible young people – teaching them that they can do the same with their own lives, that they can learn to love to read, even when it is hard and no one sees in them the future God sees.

And because this young man said yes, the lives of many young people will look different! That's the priceless gift many of our teachers offer to their students each year!

I don't know if there has been a person in your life that has told you that they see things in you that others have missed. Maybe there has been a moment where you

felt a person or even the Spirit of God telling you that the purposes for which you are created are so much bigger than you have imagined. Every single one of us is born into this world a unique and beautiful creation—ready to bring forth incredible things. Things that only you can do. And if you don't know that about yourself you need to. Because that is the kind of creative work that God is all about!

And for those of us who know that – or who have known that about ourselves, I think it's safe to say that we need to be reminded from time to time! We need to be reminded that we are created with love and with purpose because the truth is that things can get really hard. Sometimes just living can be almost more than we can bare. Somedays we get bogged down with the details and the annoying frustrations of life. And someday we face challenges that seem insurmountable / and we just can't see to the other side of it.

And so we need to be reminded - to keep believing that God has created us to do good and beautiful and tremendous things in the world. Even during this time of a global pandemic and societal protesting to the injustices in our communities and world.

You know, Matthew doesn't tell us who these little ones are. We can assume they are those among the most vulnerable surrounding Jesus or perhaps in Matthew's community. But what strikes me is the simplicity of what's called for. Just a cup of cold water given to someone in need in the name of a disciple of Jesus.

How might that translate for us as we live our own lives today? Maybe it's a listening ear to a story unfamiliar to us, or one that is very different from our own

story, maybe it's sharing an encouraging word, a helping hand? I don't know, but I suspect there are opportunities to offer cups of cold water almost everywhere we look.

And that, when you whittle it all down, seems is all it takes to be a disciple, to acknowledge Jesus, to share in the prophet's reward. No heroic act – although those are no doubt welcome – just minor acts of compassion, and small gestures of grace. Because, in the end, when you reach out with the love of Christ to another, there is no small gesture.

You know, I met Jesus in my grandfather, my Sunday School teacher, in the homeless guy on the corner of Madison and Wells, in my friend Ruth, and in a woman I met one time in a coffee shop. I have met Jesus in person all over the place and all throughout my life. Countless people who reflected back to me the love and truth of God. When I looked at them, I saw God. When I received them, I received God.

And that's us – that's the call –

Jesus calls us to love even in the time of coronavirus and global uprisings around the systemic injustices in our world. What else might you be able to do to help? How might God use our talents, gifts, and skills in times like these? Let us tap into God's imagination, if we do the opportunities that present themselves will be limitless!

Siblings in Christ, Jesus beckons to us to follow his lead in our own circles of life.

Be generous with your love, whether that's in person, or virtually. The world needs God's love so badly right now. As you go about your life in these challenging times, even if you're stuck at home, live generously in word and deed. Share lavishly, but safely, the peace and love of the God who has claimed you as one of his beloved disciples!

Who will meet Jesus this week in you? Who will see you this week and also see God? Maybe through something you say or do not say. Maybe the time you take to listen. Maybe the care you offer to someone right at the moment they need it. Who is it that will see Jesus in you? For whom will you be Christ's representative in the world – right where you are, in the places where you already find yourself.

Amen.