

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 28, 2020  
“Random Acts of Kindness” (Matthew 10:40-42)

It’s difficult to watch the news or read anymore, isn’t it? Every day there is the discouraging news of more pandemic related deaths, and more news of protests over racial injustice – often leading to rioting, looting, and other destructive acts. These are the things taking the headlines each day. Then further into the broadcasts, we hear of political corruption, burglaries, rapes, murders, and acts of terrorism.

What kind of world is it where law enforcement suffocates a citizen to death, a community is torn apart by a school or church shooting, a member of the GLTB community is beaten into unconsciousness, a teenager is cyber bullied into taking her own life? Things like this fill the whole half hour.

But then, there at the very end of the broadcast, we get that 60 second heart-warming story of some good deed: a young kid selling lemonade to raise money to feed the hungry, a teen collecting toys for a children’s hospital, a hospital janitor stopping to build LEGOS with a pediatric patient, a UPS deliveryman parking his truck to throw a football with a boy on his route, a pro athlete donating millions for hurricane relief or paying the salaries of arena employees laid off during the coronavirus crisis.

Think of what life could be if these were reversed – if stories depicting the good side of humanity filled 29 minutes of the news broadcast and there was only one story of humanity’s darker side? What if everyone did one small-cup-of kindness each day? And *those* were the stories that got our attention? That’s what Jesus tells us to do in today’s gospel text. *Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones...they will not lose their reward.* Jesus tells us that there are rewards when we welcome others in his name and when we perform acts of kindness – something as seemingly insignificant as offering a cup of water.

This reminds me of a story concerning George Morrison, a famous Scottish preacher. Morrison dreamed one night that he traveled up to heaven. There at the pearly gates he introduced himself to St. Peter, but St. Peter couldn’t find his name in the Book of Life. Morrison tried to explain that he was a pastor, a man of God, but St. Peter had never heard of him. Morrison protested that had spent years in a well-known ministry and had brought many souls to Christ, but St. Peter still couldn’t locate him. Finally, St. Peter found him. *Oh, I do have a notation here,* St. Peter remarked, pointing to his name. It says, *one night he sat up all night long with someone who was dying.* The dream spoke to Morrison. For all his great fame and accomplishment, he would be known in heaven only for his deeds of kindness.

Jesus is telling us that he wants us to offer hospitality, that he wants us to be loving and compassionate toward others – especially those who are in need. This becomes a central message in Jesus’ teachings, and later in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus goes on to say that when we offer food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, a welcome to strangers, clothing to the unclothed, comfort for the sick or imprisoned, love for our enemies, then we do these things to him, as well. What we do, you see, reflects Christ’s image shining through us. Therefore, he commands us to show kindness, to offer that cup of cold water.

And there is a reward for those who do these things. It's not that doing these things will get us into heaven. We know that's not the case because our heavenly reward has already been given through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Nor is it that God will reach down and reward us, or that life will hand us nothing but good things. These things are possible, of course, for with God all things are possible. However, I believe the reward comes when we realize that we can, and have done, random acts of kindness. Knowing that we are capable of performing such good deeds and that we are reflecting the love of Christ to those around us is its own reward.

The reward is knowing that we have done what Christ desires of us: that we have passed on the kindness we first received from him. Think about what the Apostle Paul writes: *that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*. Christ didn't wait until we cleaned up our lives, or until we could reciprocate. He gave while expecting nothing in return – except one thing: that we extend to others the same kindness he extended to us. A kindness that expects nothing in return. A kindness where the act is itself the reward.

And you know what happens when we perform such deeds? We begin to become a certain kind of person. Kindness is contagious. Other people see it and copy it. As a result, we then feel good about the good we have done and become the kind of people others want to have as their friends. This is what Christ wants for his followers – especially those who make up the church.

Unfortunately, what happens in the secular world often filters into the church. It's easy to disregard others who are different from us. It's easy, in the busyness of life, to overlook those in need. And it's easy to avoid those who are suffering or hurting because we are uncomfortable with the pain of others or simply don't know what to say. That's what our culture often teaches us. But God calls us to do something different: to welcome and give cold water. And what a difference that can make in a church.

Let me share a story to illustrate. Pauline attended a small church in Dayton, Ohio, a number of years back. She lived in a shelter just down the street from the church and became a real test of that congregation's hospitality. Because she seldom bathed, she often smelled of urine and sweat. There were many who wished she would just walk on by, but she showed up for worship almost every Sunday. You could tell by her loud voice she had entered the building. And because she always sat near the front, no one could miss her in her knit cap and grubby overcoat. Some made sure they did not sit near her in order to avoid the odor emanating from her clothing and her body.

But there were also many who were glad she was there. One of the elders often said, *Pauline is Christ's gift to us*. He meant it in the sense that Pauline was the kind of person to whom Christ reached out, and the kind of person to whom he calls his body, the Church, to extend hospitality and compassion. And with Pauline present, they could never forget that call. This particular elder was always one of the first to greet Pauline, welcoming her with warm words and a handshake, even though she tried the patience of the congregation and even his own.

She stayed for the coffee hour after worship, sometimes interrupting people's conversations. And although she was a diabetic, she stuffed her coat pockets with cookies and cakes. One member,

concerned for her health, often tried to guide Pauline to the fruit which she had brought just for her, but Pauline wanted nothing to do with it.

And she always wanted to lead the singing. *I want to sing a song in church*, she often requested. So, a couple of times a year, she was allowed to sing. But it was always the same hymn, *My Jesus, I Love Thee*. Now Pauline's voice was not the greatest, but there was much sincerity in the way she sang. The second verse, in particular, was moving for many who heard: *I love Thee, because Thou has first loved me; If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now*. Her song described the love of God she felt coming from those people. She was indeed Christ's gift to that church, for many had learned to be a welcoming fellowship because of her.

My friends, there are Pauline's everywhere – people who need to experience the loving kindness of Christ as expressed through people like you and me. May you and I be caught performing a random act of kindness this and every day. It will definitely make a difference in our individual lives, but it will also spill over into the lives of those we encounter and make a tremendous difference there God will see to it. But more importantly, we as the body of Christ, can change the world one random act of kindness at a time.