

2020-06-28 Sue Diggory
Trinity 3 - Matthew 10 v 40 – end

Acceptance and welcome

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.

In today's Gospel passage a cup of cold water is given; a small and simple deed, but in doing so the giver is given an enormous reward – the ultimate reward, the reward that lasts for the whole of eternity.

When Oscar Wilde was sent to prison in 1895 it was the ultimate humiliation for him, he fell from grace and the once great celebrity became the great pariah. Whenever he was moved by the prison authorities in public he was jeered at and spat upon. On one occasion while being moved past a particularly hostile crowd, a friend of his was present and made a simple gesture of friendship and respect, that showed he welcomed Wilde's presence, and a gesture that silenced the crowd. As Wilde passed by, handcuffed and head bowed, the man simply raised his hat to him; it was a small and simple deed, it was a gesture that spoke of acceptance and welcome, something that we are being very challenged about today.

Wilde later wrote 'Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. I do not know to the present moment whether my friend is aware that I was even conscious of his action. It is not a thing for which one can render formal thanks in formal words. I store it in the treasure of my heart. I keep it there as a secret debt that I can never possibly repay. When wisdom has been profitless to me, and philosophy barren, and the proverbs and phrases of those who sought to give consolation as dust and ashes in my mouth, the memory of that lowly silent act of love has unsealed for me all the wells of pity, made the desert blossom like a rose, and brought me out of the bitterness of lonely exile into harmony with the wounded, broken and great heart of the world.'

The smallest and simplest of deeds, a small and simple deed, but a small and simple deed that was done in love, and shows that the recipient is accepted and is welcome. The cup of cold water referred to by Jesus is a symbol of such a deed, a small in seemingly insignificant deed but one that when done in love receives the ultimate reward.

A cup of cold water, the symbol of thousand upon thousand simple deeds of love and acceptance, of love and welcome that don't take much time or effort

to do, but ones that make an eternal difference, because they are inhabited by the presence of God.

We can all make a difference; we can all be people of acceptance and welcome, but the question we must answer is will we choose to, will we choose to be those who want to make a difference, those who want to make a difference to those who are in need, and perhaps at this time when we are being forced as a nation to examine our history will we choose to accept and welcome all, no matter where they are from, no matter how rich or poor they are, and no matter if they can be of benefit rather than a drain on what we might see as our limited resources.

Are we as the body of Christ here in Crockham Hill willing to be those who accept and welcome as Christ accepts and welcomes, to be those who are willing to give *even a cup of cold water* to those who cross our path, physically as part of our local community or more distantly as part of our nation and our world. The rule of St Benedict, written in 516AD, says this about the welcome that is to be given to strangers who come to the monastery door *All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me.* All guests without exception, not just the ones that might easily fit into our local community, or when Benedict wrote into the community of the monastery.

Next weekend we will see the start of the greatest easing of lockdown since it was implemented on the 23rd March, and we will all have many more opportunities to be people of acceptance and welcome. Much has been going on of course during lockdown and we have I know all been the beneficiaries of acts of kindness, from neighbours we have known for many years and perhaps from those we have only just got to know, all of course at a social distance as we have had to rely on help from others, as we have stayed at home as much as we possibly could.

But now, as we mover ever closer to our 'new normal' we all are being given a chance to re-evaluate our own acceptance and welcome of others, both as individuals and as a church community, as the body of Christ here in Crockham Hill, as we think about how we can begin to use our time, our talents and our wealth as a sign of acceptance and welcome to all we come in contact with, both physically and of course these days virtually as well.

It doesn't have to be a mighty deed; it might be the simple offering a listening ear to a lonely neighbour, offering to do or continue to do some shopping, or

popping a few tins or packets into the local food bank or responding to one of the many appeals for help that appear in our newspapers, come through or letter boxes or appear on our screens. These simple gestures of acceptance and welcome may be for you the offering of Christ's cup of cold water, the offering of a simple deed, a seemingly small gesture, but one that when done will bring a smile to the face of God as he sees us stepping out in faith for him.

So today as we journey closer towards what will eventually become our post-Covid 'new normal' let's pledge ourselves to be cupbearers for Christ, to be those who as we go into the next chapter of life here at Holy Trinity will be those who seek to be those who give 'cups of cold water' on behalf of Christ to all without partiality or favour knowing that if we do we too will be those who hear Jesus whisper *truly I tell you none of these will lose their reward.*