



SERMONS THAT WORK

Pentecost 5 (A) – Proper 8

[RCL] Genesis 22:1-14; Psalm 13; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42

Seeing Christ

Summer is coming. A time of gatherings and celebrations, in which many of us have something fun planned: perhaps with family, perhaps with friends. These celebrations can be wonderful opportunities to meet with small or wide circles of people, to catch up and form stronger bonds. Food is shared and maybe some drinks and a good time. It's altogether a fun and exciting time of the year for many reasons.

Except, every single family has at least one person ... one person that is kind of hard to like. Maybe they are negative all the time; maybe they complain a bit too often; maybe you know they mean well but say things that land really badly. Every family has at least *one* person that is just difficult—someone who, when they show up at the drinks table, maybe you try to find a different place to be.

There's no virtue in this, but there's also no shame in it either. We are human, and no matter how much we are devoted to kindness, we just won't like everyone. We simply can't. It isn't a moral failure so much as it is part of being imperfect humans in an imperfect world. This sermon is not going to tell you that you need to work harder to like every single person in your life. That's just not where we are heading here.

Today's Gospel text takes up the words Jesus tells his disciples at the end of commissioning them. He sends them out into the world, telling them how to behave—what to do and not to do—and offering them reassurance. He explains that some people will recognize them as doing God's work, will receive them as Christ himself, and that these people will receive their reward in the next life.

Jesus says, "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." Simple, right?

So how do we practice it?

We are trained from an early age to be kind to strangers, and we know the rough outline of how to be good hosts. We know how to make a casserole and send a thoughtful note and show up to a big event.

But then we head home. Then we head off to the people who see us all the time—or we go to the family barbecue with the people that we grew up with. And then we let our guard down. We don't need to impress them and they don't need to impress us, and we can easily forget that these are *also* the people who

carry Christ. The spark of divinity is alive and well here, too. How do we see and receive it even in a grumpy spouse, or a critical parent, or an unruly child?

How do you see Christ in the people closest to you, even when you are tired? That's the hardest call.

Sometimes a spouse who can put up with our most impatient moments gets the most of them.
Or maybe an odd uncle/aunt gets reduced to a category and we stop really listening.
Or perhaps a sibling is someone we know so well, we think they have nothing new to tell us.

It's so easy to look past someone who is there all the time. But Christ never invites us to a life of ease. Christ might well come to us the most in those who are the easiest to dismiss. Don't forget how Christ shows up in the world...

What if Christ comes to you through a person you have already decided not to take seriously? In the person who tell the same story over and over?

Those people who get under our skin offer us the chance to ask ourselves about our irritation—what is it blinding us to? What are we unable to see when we center ourselves, instead of centering Christ?

The good news—and there always is Good News in this great book of ours—is that you can start small. With “a cup of cold water,” Jesus says, or whatever a “cup of water” might mean in that relationship.

Perhaps it means paying attention to what that critical person is saying, remembering that, much of the time, people are negative because they are hurt, and recognizing how a kind word might bring healing.

Or perhaps it means not joining into another political argument to be right, but listening to the fear behind someone's position, in order to understand the way they see the world better.

You don't have to fix all your relationships or suddenly like all people, but just ask yourself this: What if Christ comes to me in the small, ordinary, slightly annoying, very human ways that I almost ignore?

Today's deceptively small gospel teaching reveals that for followers of Christ, transformation is necessary. We don't get to live our lives as we did before; we certainly don't get a life of ease and comfort. We are called to live lives oriented towards God, which means we will not be the same as before. We simply cannot encounter Christ and remain the same.

This text is a reminder that we are constantly asked to turn towards God. As Bishop Michael Curry taught us in *The Way of Love*, love is a practice. Turning is the first step—and then turning, again and again, is the lifelong practice.

And it starts small, always.

Who comes to mind to you? Who would be a person with whom to start this small practice? What does the “cup of cold water” look like for them?

Christ is already showing up in the people around us.

So how do we show up for Christ?

Christ is showing up in our lives in the people closest to us, and we are asked to recognize that presence, to let it shape how we show up, to let ourselves be transformed—in real time—by the presence of Christ in the world. Even in those right beside us.

Let us keep praying that we have eyes to see.

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