

Giving and Receiving  
Matthew 10:40-42  
July 2, 2023  
First Presbyterian, Luling

This is the third week we've been in the tenth chapter of Matthew, which is the long stretch the scholars call the "missionary discourse" in Matthew. Jesus is prone to long stretches of speaking in Matthew, which is all part of Matthew wanting to portray Jesus as the new Moses, who was also prone to long stretches of delivering God's messages to the people. The first week, Jesus has lots and lots of instructions. They are sent out as representatives of Jesus himself, almost like ambassadors or envoys. They are the only thing their audiences will know of Jesus, so everything they do and say reflects on Jesus. I do not find this reassuring. It's quite a burden to place on the ones being sent out. They also carry the responsibility of doing the same things Jesus did: healing, teaching, casting out demons, calling people to repentance. With all of those instructions, Jesus indicates that some places they go, they will be welcomed or received, and some places they go, they'll be rejected.

Then last week the passage focused on the sacrifices the apostles will have to make, though we focused on God's care of them even in the midst of hardship and sacrifice. How much more will God care for them, when God cares for even the sparrow?

This week wraps up, finally, the missionary discourse. Jesus returns to the idea that the apostles are sent out as his representatives. "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me," he reminds them. He also, clearly, returns to the idea of welcoming or receiving. That word can be translated either way. Whoever welcomes or receives a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, though it's unclear what that reward is. Whoever welcomes or receives a righteous person will in turn receive a righteous person's reward, also unclear.

Jesus is speaking to those he is sending out, but simultaneously speaking to those who will receive them. They can't be sent out without someone out there who is willing to welcome them. And those who are the welcomers or receivers also have something to give.

To the apostles, which remember means the sent-out-ones, he has given all these instructions. They have things to give, mostly intangible things. They have healing and wisdom and the opportunity to be Jesus's followers. They offer those

wherever they go, to people that receive them and people that don't. Those are significant things, life changing things. The apostles need to receive things in return, namely hospitality. Food and water and shelter, maybe some clothing. Jesus sends them out with very little to take care of them, so they need to receive things, too. The apostles have things to give and things they need to receive. They need to receive welcome in order to be able to give the things they have to give.

There are obviously other people on the other side of these interactions, though. The apostles aren't sent out into the void, but into the countryside and villages, where people are living their lives.

Those other people *also* have things to give and things they need to receive. They aren't completely passive. They have an active role in spreading the gospel. What they have to give are tangible things: hospitality, a place to stay, food, and as Jesus mentions, a cup of cold water. They don't have to make large gestures or expensive gifts in order for what they have to give to be valuable or worthy. Even a cup of cold water will show that they are welcoming the apostles. A cup of cold water doesn't seem very significant, unless you are the one who is thirsty, and then it is vitally important. These other people receive not only the things that the apostles have to give, but Jesus makes it clear that these other people are receiving, are welcoming, Jesus himself. In receiving the apostles and their gospel message, the people are receiving, are welcoming, Jesus.

The apostles are both givers and receivers. The other people are both givers and receivers. And each part of that equation is important. Each person, each community, has different roles. Not everyone needs to be the same or do the same things. Paul will write about this in 1 Corinthians, where he uses the image of the body to make the same point. Each person and community has a role to play. Each person has something to offer, and each person has something to receive.

When we give, we model the grace and generosity of the one who sent us. We are envoys, representatives of Jesus when we give. And when we receive, we receive not just the person with something to give, but we welcome Jesus himself. We are both givers and receivers at the same time.

And so we come to the table, where we are also givers and receivers, guests and hosts. I say all the time that Jesus invites us to the table. But we are also hosts, when we decide who is welcome at this table. We've decided that everyone is welcome, near and far, people who are physically present in this sanctuary, and those who are joining us from somewhere else. When we welcome everyone, we welcome Jesus, too.

We come to this table with things to give. We give our welcome to those who join us at the table. We give our commitment. We give ourselves, whatever faith we can muster up today. We bring our true and deepest selves to offer for whatever Jesus needs us for. Those are significant things we have to give.

And we come to receive. Grace up on grace, made visible in a little piece of bread and a tiny cup of juice. A cup of cold water, in a different form. It doesn't seem like much, unless you are the one that is hungry and thirsty for grace. We come to receive forgiveness and calling and encouragement and joy. We come because we are invited and welcomed by Jesus himself. We receive and we give. We receive welcome and grace, and we give it in return, to those we meet. The giving and receiving of grace is the core of the life of discipleship. We see it here at the table and we enact it in the world.