

WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART?

Sermon, June 18, 2017

Father's Day

Text: Matthew 10:40-42

I like the story of a Sunday School teacher who couldn't open the combination lock on the supply cabinet. She went to the pastor for help. The pastor came to the room, put his fingers on the dial of the combination lock, looked up serenely to heaven, moved his lips silently, looked back at the dial, and turned it to a certain number. He stopped, again looked up serenely toward heaven, again moved his lips silently, looked back at the dial, and turned to the next number. He repeated the process a third time ... looking up and moving his lips, then turned to the third and final number, opening the lock to the cabinet. The teacher gasped, "I'm in awe of your faith, pastor." He grinned, and then replied, "I have to be honest. The three numbers are written on a piece of tape up there on the ceiling."

Sometimes things are surprisingly simple when you know where to look.

Sometimes Christian faith and living is surprisingly simple, too, when you know where to "look." Let's look at our short Gospel reading from this morning. Christian faith and living might be radically summarized by the two statements, two principles, contained in the verses we just read:

Number One: When You See Jesus, You See God. When you see Jesus, you see God. "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." In the life and teachings of Jesus we can discover everything we need to know about God and His ways.

Number Two: When You See Your Neighbor, Look for Jesus. When you encounter another person, look for Jesus in that person. Ask yourself this question as you interact with people: If this person was Jesus, how would I treat him/her? And then act accordingly! With respect, with consideration, with honor, with compassion, with caring, with affirmation, with encouragement, with appreciation.

We've all seen the TV commercials for the Capital One credit cards, with Samuel Jackson or Alec Baldwin or Morgan Freeman asking us, "What's in YOUR wallet?" And the implication is if what's in your wallet is not a Capital One credit card, well, you are missing out on all the *rewards* you could be getting! Every credit card company out there is trying to convince us that running up more debt is somehow a "rewarding" thing to do. Discounted merchandise, frequent flyer miles, room upgrades, cash back formulas, are all promised as our "reward" ... our reward for basically jacking up our already-huge monthly bills. For the record, let me state the obvious ... increasing debt usually means increasing *burden*, not rewards. Let me add a disclaimer: I use credit cards and find them almost indispensable in today's economy and extremely convenient ... sometimes too much so. But for the most part, all those perks and presents are dangled before our insatiable appetites and desires in order to draw our attention away from our ever escalating debt as we carelessly indulge and dig our credit holes deeper. Ever increasing debt that's your real "reward" for what's in your wallet (*or, more accurately, for what's increasingly NOT in your wallet, i.e., real money!*). A "reward" shouldn't add to your already difficult burden. A "reward" should *reward* you, lift you, elevate you; not crush you further.

Jesus promises rewards, rewards that lift and transform, rewards that will elevate and not further captivate, rewards that will come not because of what is in peoples' *wallets*, but because of what is in their *hearts*. And Jesus intimates you can tell what's in a person's heart by the way they treat His disciples. He promised rewards to those who treat His representatives well: "Those who receive you receive me, and the one who receives Me receives the One who sent me." There are two implications given here: (a) those who receive you because you represent Jesus also receive God Himself, and (b) the kindnesses you receive, AND the kindnesses you give, will somehow, someday, in some way ... be rewarded. That's the promise of Jesus to His faithful disciples.

The background of our short Gospel selection is that Jesus is preparing His disciples to go out on their first missionary trip. He didn't sugar coat what they would be facing. They were about to go out into the world, and that world was full of *people*. Jesus warned His disciples pain and persecution, criticism and complaints, disgrace and even death would accompany their efforts to go out and serve

as His representatives in that people-filled world. Author John Ortberg has a book entitled Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, which he opens by taking his readers into a department store and walking us down an aisle where there's a section of merchandise marked, "*Damaged Goods. Reduced prices. All sales final.*" He drew the analogy that when it comes to the human race we have reached the Damaged Goods Department of this world; every single human being has something that isn't quite up to the original Manufacturer's specifications. In short, there really is something "damaged" in each and every person in the Damaged Goods Department that is this world. Ortberg goes on to write about minds that won't open, mouths that won't shut, backbones that won't hold firm, knees that keep jerking, stiff necks that won't yield. Jesus warned His disciples difficulties would accompany their efforts to serve as His representatives, but He also promises rewards.

First, He promised a reward for those who received a prophet because he was a prophet; they would receive a prophet's reward. At first glance, this might not seem like much of a reward ... if you are familiar with your Old Testament, you know that prophets were "rewarded" by getting kicked out of their homes, swallowed by whales, suffering exile; being ridiculed, dismissed, and/or persecuted, some beheaded, some sawn in two, some stoned. But here's a short list of genuine rewards received by prophets and those who receive them: Dynamic and thrilling encounters with the living God. Divine explanations/insights about what is happening behind the "seen." Secrets from God. Contacts with angels. Profound times of joy. Real wisdom. Personal peace. Clear direction and purpose.

And Jesus promised rewards for those who welcome "a righteous person." Welcome those who are doing right, welcome those who are encouraging and promoting what is right and good and true and beautiful. Welcome them, encourage them, cheer them on, receive them into your company; you will be rewarded for it! Now, there is a sense in which righteousness is its own reward. When we manage to do something right the sweetness of that moment is its own reward, but isn't that sweetness is enhanced when others recognize it, welcome it, encourage it, affirm it? Yes, it feels good to do something right; it feels good to do good; it feels good to do well. And I think we can all attest that it also feels REALLY good to be affirmed by someone else when we do good! It feels good to have your "right-ness" recognized, appreciated, affirmed, encouraged. When you do that, when you affirm someone for what they are doing right and good, well, you *welcome* a righteous person.

We all enjoy rewards. Sometimes it is the smallest of rewards that can give us the biggest boost. If we are truly acting as Christ's representatives, if we are going out in mission and ministry for Jesus, we will inevitably find ourselves resisted in this increasingly secularized world. Sometimes when we bend over backwards, we get pushed over. Sometimes when we turn the other cheek, that one gets hit pretty hard, too. It's at such times that we really need someone or something to bring a moment of refreshment into our lives; it is at such times a "cup of cold water" goes down really, really well. And if nobody is forthcoming with any such refreshment, well, sometimes you just need to reward yourself! Go buy yourself an Allie's donut, or go get yourself some flowers to put on your table, In short, give a cup of cold water to yourself! But also determine to take time and effort to refresh others, to reward others, to appreciate others, to encourage others. "Welcome" and refresh those who are trying to follow Jesus. Keep a look out for friends or companions or co-workers who are suffering through a real dry spell, especially if life is going well for you today. Offer them the cup of cold water, the "reward", of a genuine word of appreciation, of a "thank you;" offer them the refreshment of encouragement, offer them the "pick-me-up" of praise. Too many people go to bed thirsty at night ... thirsty for a thank you, thirsty for some recognition that he/she is working as hard as he/she can, thirsty for some encouragement. Offer a cup of cold water. Circulate rewards freely. Let us all become reward entrepreneurs, persons who are always hard at work at being creative to find ways to make somebody's day and refreshing others just because they belong to Jesus.

Again, sometimes things are surprisingly simple when you know where to look. Look up and see Christian faith and living might be radically summarized by these two principles: (1) *When you see Jesus, you see God.* (2) *When you see your neighbor, look for Jesus.* And act accordingly ... with respect, with consideration, with honor, with compassion ... and with affirmation, encouragement, and gratitude.

In so doing, show the world what's in YOUR heart ... and enjoy reaping the promised rewards.