

Church Talk: 28th June 2020

Based on Matthew 10: 40-42

So, I'd like to explore today's reading from Matthew 10: 40-42 and I wanted to approach this with a little bit of background to the story. So, Jesus has already selected his 12 disciples and, he lists at the start of the chapter who they are going to be. He then instructs them to gather around because he wants to have a pep talk with them, give them some instructions about what he wants them to do as a team and some advice - the do's and don'ts if you like.

As well as the advice, he gives his disciples a big tip – a warning like verse 16: I am sending you out like sheep amongst the wolves.” But the focus today isn't necessarily about the rules and regulations as such. I think it would be fair to say that we have had a lot of these recently and rightfully so, we shall expect much more in the coming months to keep us safe. No, it's about what God is trying to say in the last part of Matthew 10. Now some might say that the last few verses is basically Jesus summarising and I can see why some would agree because yes, whoever accepts me, accepts you and whoever accepts a Prophet, will be rewarded and whoever, accepts the righteous will also be rewarded accordingly. **The End.**

However, for me it's not **The End** and what I would like to encourage you to think about is that these few verses are not just a summary – far from it. This particular passage is telling us what us, as Christians need to do and how to behave towards others. We need to be welcoming, whether it is towards each and every member of our five churches, or whether it is during Bible Club, the parish ride (in the future) or Soul Cafe or any activity or event that we are involved in.

We need to be welcoming to the people who come to our doors, people and services who provide us with our daily and essential needs. We need to be welcoming to people who are homeless, living in poverty, deprived or oppressed...basically those in need. And actually, we need to be welcoming to those who appear to have everything...trust me, they may have the latest car, the posh house, the bling dripping from them but you know what, money can buy you lots of things but it can't buy you love and certainly won't buy you a place in heaven - by the way. But by welcoming all these people who fall into these groups, you are showing them that there is a different richness, the richness and purity of God's love.

Ok, so we have established that we need to be welcoming but then you see we need to think about how we are going to do this. What are we going to do?

So, we can put a note through the door just simply wishing someone well, or we can bake something for someone, help someone to do something, your children could do a drawing, plant up a pot and give it to someone, send them a text message, smile and give a wave as you pass their home or sit outside your home in readiness for anyone who may visit just like us and our neighbours do (2 metres apart). As Jesus says in the bible, as Christians you must “always be ready.”

But it's not just the practical things either is it? It's not what you say, it's your actions. It's your attitude towards others. It's how you greet each other so, do you have a miserable face or a happy one? Do you come up to someone with a big smile (2 metres apart) or, do you look at the person and pretend you didn't see them? Which do you think would be welcoming?

The reading then goes on to say about being **rewarded** when you have welcomed others. But don't expect the reward to necessarily come in the form of money as such. Of course, if you receive it remember that it has come from God because you need to pay your bills regardless. Jesus' rewards come in the form of something else, something priceless.

Let me tell you a story:

11 ½ years ago, our daughter Mya was born and we had already decided that we were going to have her Christened and basically we couldn't decide at the time whether it was going to be the nearest Catholic church where we got married or Austrey Church. So, as part of the decision making if you like, we met with Stephen Banks and had a lengthy and informative chat with him and it was without hesitation that he would be happy to christen Mya. What stood out for me in this meeting with Stephen was his welcoming nature and the invitation to come to Soul Cafe regardless of what we decided to do regarding Mya's christening. And because of how welcoming he made us feel, we just had to come to Soul Cafe.

I remember the first day at one of the schools and this energetic looking woman with a huge beaming smile called Sally Parkes came up to us and was so welcoming. AND THEN, a sea of other members of the Soul Cafe team came up to us and welcomed us with open arms. And because of how they made us feel, we just had to come back and that's still been the case now.

So coming back to our reading, when the Lord rewards us, it is not for monetary gain, we are rewarded by enriching our church with more and more people who want to know Christ. Jesus may have started with 12 disciples, but that wasn't it, we are all disciples of God and we will continue to grow. We are rewarded with Jesus' energy and strength to live another day and to spread the word the way he intended.

So, as I come to the end of my talk, there are some key things we need to be conscious of particularly as we look to open the church for the first time in this lockdown; this afternoon for private prayer:

- We need to be mindful that there may be some new people visiting who have come to know Christ in the last 3 months
- That some people may be new members to the village and want to explore it further.
- That we must always be welcoming to anyone who we come into contact with regardless of our ethnicity, other religions, our culture, language, individual opinions
- And we must hold on to the fact that God will reward accordingly for our good works
- And remember...you are a disciple, you are a Christian and you are representing the Lord, Jesus Christ just as verse 40 says.

God Bless and thank you

Being welcoming is not just through our words, it's through our actions.