

## **Holy Happenings - Matthew 10:40-42**

### **Slide: Interruptions Everywhere**

Life is full of interruptions. Big ones. Small ones. Sudden ones like the pandemic that interrupted everyone all at once. Small ones like that sudden phone call you need to attend to. If you had taken a walk around my day on Wednesday, when I was just beginning to ponder what to preach for this morning, you would have seen the many and various interruptions thwarting that effort, catering to my procrastination and writing block all the further.

Interruptions are actually a big part of what I do as an ordained minister. It's a bit bizarre to say this, but interruption is often what pastor's coordinate on a daily basis. It's the nature of ministry in general that things happen along the way. Have a blank schedule for the day? Chances are, that's just what it looks like! And, all our staff could tell you that that is called ministry. Interruptions are expected and during the course of a day sometimes lead to new ideas, new people, but also on the flip side, challenges.

When someone dies, well that can't wait. One drops all things to tend to such holy urgency. Coming by the office with a question, sipping coffee while talking to a beloved St. John's friend as they walk in the door - these happenings are a part of what we all do here, including all our amazing volunteers. They are holy happenings. Sometimes even the tough interruptions of homelessness, crisis, and illness, although never welcome, they are a part of the life of faith.

### **Slide: Discipleship**

What are we to make of the Gospel this week? If you had been here last week, you would have heard a word about the hardship of discipleship that might have persuaded even the most faithful to say, "why would I want to follow Jesus again"? In what scholars often call "Jesus' Sermon to the Called Ones" from the Gospel of Matthew, last week's words from Chapter 9 and 10 don't give us the rosiest picture of what discipleship could mean for those Jesus calls to follow.

In last's week's Gospel, Jesus tells his newly formed group of disciples as he is sending them out to bring the Good News that he didn't come to make things easy. Being a follower of him will mean hardship. It will mean brother against brother and father against son. It could cause division, suffering and,

well...interruptions. According to last week's Gospel reading, one might think that this whole WAY of faith following leads to much more trouble than it is worth. Here are some of the words of Jesus from last week:

*"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."*

Tough love Jesus! And then, directly following those words of risk in faith comes today for us to hear some beautiful statements on the benefits of discipleship, words of welcome, words of reward. Those are today's words from Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. Taken together, however, I find that these readings help us to see the whole of what it is to be a community of faith. We work on the hard tasks together while also receiving the promises from God, the rewards from those important hard interruptions that lead into the holy happenings. But, there was one sentence in today's Gospel that really jumped out at me this week.

### **Slide: Willow Falls**

That last phrase Jesus says:

*"and 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."*

What a tiny thing, don't you think to give a cold cup of water to someone? Surely that is so small a thing. Here Jesus emphasizes the word "even", meaning that EVEN just simple little acts of helping someone is not a small thing – "even a cold cup of water...even just that. Here he seems to be saying that discipleship, following him, does not always include the huge sacrifices or difficult suffering of the WAY of the cross that includes our all and everything, but even the small ways, the little ways, the holy happenings that come to us; *even* the interruptions that lead to life giving and intentional small acts. Those are valuable -even those. Even giving a cup of water, or a hug to those who are sad, or offering a ride, or volunteering to do something small for the larger goal.

As life's interruptions are big and small, so is discipleship. Following Jesus doesn't need to be heroic or completely obvious to the world when we do it. Like the small acts of kindness, devotion, forgiveness, and little words that may go largely unnoticed, in the life of faith, Jesus says to us in sharp

contrast to the complexity and difficulty of the life of faith that there is no such thing as small gestures. These holy happenings occur in big ways and small ways. And, in fact, following Christ in our lives means that these are moments big and small that bring about the Good News for others and for the world. And, *even* as we do these things, the reward is so great. We cannot possibly know what small kindness causes big ripples in the lives of others.

### **Slide: Starfish**

You are probably aware of this story called “The Star Thrower” and if you are not, you are about to! It’s a story about a man who is walking on a beautiful beach on the Pacific Ocean. And, he sees off in the distance a young man on the beach picking up starfish after starfish on the sand and throwing them back into the sea. As the observer gets closer, he calls out,

“Good morning! What are you doing?” The young man paused, looked up and replied, “Throwing starfish into the ocean.”

“I guess I should have asked, “Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?”

“The sun is up and the tide is going out. And if I don’t throw them in they’ll die.

“But young man, don’t you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it. You can’t possibly make a difference!”

The young man listened politely. Then bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea, past the breaking waves. “It made a difference for that one!”

This story helps us to see that *even* a small gesture, ones that on the outside may look endless, futile, or even not worth the time, do mean something to someone, somewhere or some time. We cannot know now what affect a holy happening will have on the greater good, the seed that is planted in the dark can reveal a plant larger than we can imagine.

### **Slide: Summer Stretch Group**

This last week, our Summer Stretch Middle School Youth and High school mentors went to the Eau Claire Schools and packed hygiene kits for kids who are in need. We all know that not every child who goes to school has shampoo or the entire daily needs such as toothpaste. The rate of

homelessness in the schools is much higher than many of us imagine and unfortunately, it often falls to the schools to provide the care that they see kids have day in and day out. Or course we would want to help our schools with this. And, our youth join in this ministry to help.

In the morning devotion on Wednesday, our CYF Director Matt (Children Youth and Family) reminded our youth of the ELCA Mission Statement – God’s Work. Our Hands. He asked them what is God’s work and why would our hands have a part in that. After some prodding, our young people were able to express that God uses us to bring about the work God has in this world. That includes the interruptions to our lives which often point to us being aware and seeing the hardships others endure.

We have a part in relieving those hardships for others through Christ. By having programs like Summer Stretch, the people of St. John’s create intentional interruptions, ones that are eye opening, so that holy happenings can and do occur. A cup of cold water, or in this case, a toothbrush or face soap, does affect someone’s life. And, the rewards of doing these things lead to larger impacts than we may know. I know that our high school youth, too, will encounter many interruptions in their lives when they learn and work at Rosebud Lakota Reservation in a few weeks. I can’t wait to hear their stories.

**Slide: Summer Stretch Kids Hug**

Yet, many of our interruptions in life are not planned. We all have these interruptions and many of them are often unwelcome or irritating. Still these intersections are opportunities for holy happenings in our midst, where healing, mercy, and deeds of compassion small and large, may happen. They may not ‘save the world’ so to speak, but it may have an enormous effect for just one person. And, each of these little ways we are church together, Christ promises, will bring so many rewards. Even science proves that doing good makes you feel good. Just ask these kids from Summer Stretch. They know!

So, here is my challenge to you this week, dear church! When an interruption occurs this week to you: big ones, small ones, difficult ones, easy ones, consider what holy happening could come of it, for *even* a cup of cold water matters to someone in the vast breadth of time. Amen.