

A Storytelling Commentary on Matthew 10:40-42

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“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.
Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet
will receive a prophet’s reward;
and whoever welcomes a righteous person
in the name of a righteous person
will receive the reward of the righteous.
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.”

This is the last part of Jesus' speech to his disciples. You could tell the whole chapter over these weeks and then allow the sermon to address different parts of the chapter each week. This gives you the opportunity to establish Jesus as a person speaking to his disciples and for the audience to have an opportunity to live into it and to think about their own discipleship.

The verbal thread that links all of the episodes here is welcome, so it is all about who welcomes who. It is a good idea to emphasize this word. If you memorize the sequence the rest of the speech falls into place because the verbal threads are so consistent in the first two parts. All you have to do is get in mind the structure of the welcomes.

These are about the anticipation of and the promise to those who would potentially welcome the disciples in their itinerate ministry. What Jesus is doing is sending his disciples out as wandering, itinerate charismatics. In philosophy, there were the Cynics and other philosophers who wandered around the ancient near eastern world and lived off the land. That's what these disciples are going to do. They are going to go out with nothing and live off of what people will give them in exchange for the teaching, preaching and healing ministries that they will give to the people of the villages and towns where they are going.

This is about the very practical question of how they are going to survive and what are the rewards for those who will give you things. It's basically a promise of rewards in the kingdom of heaven. That's what is engaged with this "whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet." It may be that the prophet that is coming is unknown but if they are connected with a prophet, in this case Jesus, and they welcome this prophet in the name of a prophet, then they will gain a prophet's reward.

This logic is related in turn to the dynamics of hospitality in the ancient world. If you want a story to tell along with this speech, I would suggest that you tell the story of Abraham welcoming the three angels when they came to announce to Sarah that she would have a son. This is a classic story of hospitality and of welcoming these unknown visitors because he recognized that they were in some way connected with God. He welcomed them in the name of God. The promise of reward then is the promise of the

extension of hospitality that becomes a part of the life of the community and of the world and the energy around the extension of hospitality is the formation of new relationships across the boundaries of tribes, ethnic groups, families, etc.

This is a broadening of the practice of hospitality, one of the primary virtues in the ancient near east and in poor communities around the world now. You can be treated like royalty in communities of poor people who will give whatever they have in order to make you comfortable. That's the spirit of this. When you tell this, communicate that spirit of hospitality and of graciousness and overflowing welcoming to people who would be guests. That is the possibility for disciples who go out into the world without much.

Jesus' speech is addressed to the audience as disciples. But it is also addressed to the audience as those who may welcome Jesus' disciples into their villages and homes. Furthermore, it is addressed to contemporary congregations in regard to the manner in which they will treat those whom God sends to them. In many contexts now, prophets and preachers are treated as employees rather than as representatives of Jesus. This may be an opportunity for you as a preacher/disciple to define who you are and the promise of goodness that awaits those who welcome you with honor. It's all about relationships.