

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

WELCOMED TO RECEIVE

Matthew 10:40-42

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Analysis by Bill White

Jesus said: 40 “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 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; 42 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.”

DIAGNOSIS: It’s Easier to Give Than Receive

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Resisting / Refusing Hospitality*

Jesus’ teaching in these verses is directed to his followers, not the crowds. The focus here is upon those who are hospitable to disciples of Christ. And the truth of the matter is that there are times when Christians are the ones being welcomed, times when we are the recipients’ of hospitality, times when we are the follower of Jesus standing at the door receiving a cup of cold water.

How do you react as one being offered hospitality? Have you ever been on a mission trip and been offered hospitality by the very folk you were striving to help? Were you willing to accept their

hospitality? ("You mean sleep here?" "Drink this—what is it?!?" "I can't take your food, I mean, I have plenty and that's all you've got." "No, I can't accept this; you can't afford this!" "No, you've got to let me pay; I insist!")

An observable problem for would-be disciples of Jesus Christ is the difficulty or inability to accept hospitality. (I don't know about you, but I have to admit that it really does make me feel flat-out awkward, at times even very uncomfortable, to be the recipient of someone else's gracious hospitality.)

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Resisting / Refusing the Grace of God*

On the surface this may seem a trivial matter. Not so according to the scriptures. A careful reading of the Bible reveals the importance to God of what we call "hospitality." According to Matthew 10:40-42, hospitality and acts of compassion extended to Jesus' followers are, in effect, extended to Christ himself.

Hence, there are at least two faith issues here. First, the person who resists or refuses hospitality may very well be a stumbling block to the faith of the giver. It may even be that faith in Jesus Christ is what is motivating the giver, and our resistance to their gracious act is impeding their relationship to Christ, their very faith in Christ.

The second issue is the faith of the person to whom the gift is offered. There is in the act of accepting a gift some acknowledgment of dependence. And is it not true that for sinful human beings it is very difficult to admit dependence on other persons—let alone God, especially when things are going well? Hence, if we refuse to receive gracious gifts and acts, given sacrificially to help us, are we not also refusing to acknowledge our dependence on others? Are we not, in reality, clinging to faith in our own abilities and efforts to totally

take care of ourselves? (“I don’t need help or handouts from anyone!”)

Beneath the surface of this seemingly trivial matter of refusing hospitality lies the misplaced faith of trusting in oneself instead of Christ.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Resisting / Refusing God’s Rewards*

Worst of all, if we resist/refuse to receive the gracious gift of another, would that not indicate that we are headed down a perilous path, that is, to being unwilling or unable to receive God’s gracious gift of faith in Christ? If we don’t see ourselves as needing grace and welcome from anyone including God, if we unwilling to acknowledge our need for God’s grace and confess our dependence upon God-in-Christ for salvation, the rewards of Matthew 10:40-42 are lost.

PROGNOSIS: Welcomed to Receive

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *God’s Hospitality / God’s Reward*

God recognizes our dependence on God whether we do or not. And so at the right time according to his plan, our gracious God welcomes and offers hospitality to all lost, sinful humans by taking on the burden of their sins in the person of Jesus Christ, who gives up his life on the cross, and gives a home with God. Moreover, the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ sends the Holy Spirit out with us into the world, offering God’s eternal hospitality wherever we go, God’s reward to this fallen world.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Receiving Christ’s Hospitality*

Through this same crucified and resurrected Lord, and by the power of his Holy Spirit, we come to know and look forward to

this gracious hospitality; it is the cool drink of true faith for a parched soul; it is the forgiveness that makes it possible for us to acknowledge (even confess) that we need and depend on God. Jesus' hospitality is the gift that makes it possible for us to exchange our faith-in-self for real faith in Christ.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Receiving Christian Hospitality*

Better still, God in Christ forgives all the times we resisted or refused to receive welcome and hospitality from others, and God's Holy Spirit frees us and empowers us to change who we are and the way we will act. We now "get to" graciously receive the welcome and hospitality of others, and receive it as if it were from Christ himself.