

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

WELCOMING THE MESSENGER

Matthew 10:40-42

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

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: Never Mind Welcome

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Memory Loss*

Jesus’ instruction to his disciples makes good sense: “If they welcome you they welcome me,” he says. But why these words about welcome? Wasn’t this notion of welcome one that had existed as far back as Israel could remember? Welcome was precisely how Jews practiced hospitality. Ah, but the reason Jesus advised the disciples about welcome was because Israel had lost its memory for welcome. God’s people had forgotten that the way strangers and sojourners came to know God’s graciousness was through the open hand of his people receiving others into their homes and caring for them.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Rejecting the*

Message

So were God's people simply forgetful. Was their sin simply one of omission? Or was this a more active rejection-one in which not only the sojourner was disregarded but also God's expectation for welcome? If the latter was the case, then the disciples might have something to worry about. If they carried Jesus' words into the world, and received no welcome-had no place to lay their heads, they might fail to accomplish their mission; and, consequently, Jesus would not be known, and neither would his Father who sent him. A lot was at stake for the disciples regarding this message and this ministry.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Dead Messenger*

This ministry was much more risky than they could have anticipated. And Jesus warned them of that. But it wasn't until they saw Jesus-the messenger from the Father, who preached welcome to all-hanging from the cross, that they saw just how risky it really was. The message about Jesus and the arrival of God's kingdom was threatening. And few listeners liked to have their world rattled so hard. So they killed the messenger. And if that was the way they received God's own Son (who was more than a prophet or a righteous person), the disciples hardly had a hope.

PROGNOSIS: Resurrecting Welcome

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Welcome Message*

The disciples hardly had a hope. That is, until Jesus met them on the other side of his grave. Met them and welcomed them into a new life and ministry. In this post-resurrection ministry, not even closed doors and rejection could stop Jesus' message from enduring. Jesus had endured the cross and grave for the disciples and, even more curiously and wonderfully, for the sake of the same unwelcoming world that had killed him. Could there be any more welcome message than that? God had gone all the way

to the grave to bring his enemies back into his fold; now that was a message worth sharing!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Receiving the Message*

That message moved the disciples to welcome Jesus back into their lives-despite the despair and disbelief they had faced at the cross, despite their pre-resurrection dismissal of the ministry with which Jesus had entrusted them. On this side of the resurrection they understood: The Father truly had sent the Son, Jesus. And now Jesus graciously was sending them to inform the world. It's the very same commission that we modern-day disciples bear. And, because the first disciples bore the gospel to us in faith, we welcome that Word and bear it to the world.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *The Door to Welcome*

Jesus welcomed the disciples to carry the message. But the disciples-then and now-aren't the only people for whom the message is intended. Jesus died for the "little ones" so that they too might be connected to the Son and so the Father. And even if that welcome begins with a mere cup of water, nevertheless through the kindness of God's faithful people strangers and sojourners are coming to know God's graciousness. And the door is opened to receiving the Messenger and, consequently, the Message.