

30.09.2018  
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## Introduction

**Unicef** works with the most vulnerable children across the world. On their website is the story of Kismat, a little girl born into a Unicef supported health centre and now being raised in a refugee camp. Her eighteen year old mother, Hazera, and her family were forced to flee soldiers in their home in Myanmar and have fled to nearby Bangladesh. This, Unicef writes, was not the start in life Hazera had imagined for her daughter.

When we read Jesus' admonition to be thorough in following his commands of love and kindness, even to the little ones, who do we imagine? Is it tiny babies like Kismat? Think about those Jesus calls us to love as we read today's passage.

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## Text

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

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## Comment

‘More than 680,000 Rohingya people, around 60% of them children, have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh since last August. Camps, which were already home to over 300,000 Rohingya refugees, are now overwhelmed. The lives of thousands of children like Kismat are in danger.’

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/rohingya-refugee-bangladesh-myanmar/>

The refugee crisis in Bangladesh, a country little able to cope with its own natural disasters and poverty, is one of many across the globe. If we look at the littlest ones on God’s earth the story of baby Kismat could be repeated many times. There are many vulnerable poor and our challenge is to provide for them as best we can. Jesus is clear that our duty is to do good in his name. However, we are not to stop at that, we are also not to try to prevent others from doing his work, even if we feel they are different from us, or not in the church, or not in our group or denomination.

Jesus tells the disciples not to stop those who do good in his name. Even the moment this warning to his closest disciples is out of his mouth he also reassures them that anyone who gives them aid, even a cup of water, will be rewarded for that act. We are placed in the world to give aid, to graciously receive help, and most importantly never to stop, prevent, or hinder, the help or aid given to another.

The list that follows may have been humorous in its presentation at the time. I can imagine Jesus pointing to the body parts in turn, neck, hand, foot, and eye, a public speaker with dramatic flair building a great rapport with his audience. Each example has the same force, but adds to the impact of the speech as a whole.

The cost of allowing ourselves to put a stumbling block in front of others is high indeed. Any step we can take to avoid that, even if it is of personal cost to ourselves, is worth it. Jesus calls us to provide for the little ones, and to do so together.

His conclusion is another metaphor, ‘have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.’ The two-way relationship between personal consistency and peacebuilding is contained within this idea: be strong within yourselves and be kind to each other.

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## Response

Look at the Website for Unicef following the link above.

Either on your own or in a group think about what we can do to help the refugees from Myanmar and in what ways we can work to enable those who work with them.

What might put a stumbling block in the way of aid?

What would be the cost of that stumbling block?

OR

Think about the metaphor Jesus uses of the body. What does this metaphor say to you? What would you relinquish in order to follow Jesus? Are there ever 'stumbling blocks' you might put in the path of others? What would they be?

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## Prayer

God who rewards the gift of a cup of water

Enable us to ensure

That our gifts to the littlest ones

Are not given at the cost of stopping the gifts of another

Nor at the expense of peace between those who follow your commands

In and through our Lord Jesus Christ

Who, when thirsty, took the cup of water offered

by the woman at the well

and offered eternal life in return

Amen