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Introduction

From Matthew 9.35–10.42 Jesus gives his disciples instructions about their Mission to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (10.6). They are given remarkable miraculous powers, but they are also to expect conflict, suffering and threats and even the break-up of close family ties. As they are sent out, they will know not only the presence of Jesus but of God.

The disciples’ commitment is to be absolute and focussed. Just before today’s passage we read; “Whoever loves father or mother 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.”(10.37–39)

These verses are addressed to communities of Christians and they are encouraged to welcome the itinerant missionaries who need hospitality and support. The writer of the Gospel clearly has a message for Christian communities several generations after the time of the apostles, and indeed for us.

These verses affirm that as Christians in our time and place, we participate in God’s mission in the world. The ministry of welcome is more than providing food and water, it is the costly identification and solidarity with those on the front line of God’s activity in the world.

Text

Matthew 10:40–42

“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.”

Comment

Many years ago, I heard Jim Wallis of the Sojourners Community speak at Corrymeela.

He was addressing a common theme of those times “Live simply, that others may simply live.” Jim spoke with compassion and impact. I was disturbed and distrusted whether my response to his message was merely emotion of the moment or if it would make a long-term difference. I spoke about this with Jim afterwards. I said that I agreed with all that he said, but doubted whether it would change my life.

Decades later, I still remember his response. He said ‘It’s not the principles you stand on that matters. It’s where you sit that makes a difference’. Jim Wallis had learnt that real change is not so about the opinions we hold or whether we agree or disagree on this or that – real change is depends happens through relationships.’ If your closest friend, someone you frequently sit beside and spend time with, was dying of hunger, you wouldn’t have a problem about what to do with the change in your pocket.’ Our choice of friends shapes our priorities and actions.

Responding to the call to mission would involve confronting conflict. It would entail taking up the cross – to face the ‘powers of the day’ as Jesus did, without compromise and if necessary to face the consequences. It would demand a choice about our relationships and the priority we give to each. It would entail loss, of much that we value, because we are committed to a greater good.

The Guests – Prophets, the Righteous, and the Weak

In Matthew the writer frequently associates the role of the prophet with opposition, suffering and death (cf. 5:11–12, 23:29–36). In welcoming a prophet, we identify with the fate of our guest and the consequences of their calling.

Similarly in welcoming the righteous person, we embrace their radical commitment to justice which can cost lives.

The ‘Little ones’– the travelling missionaries whom we encouraged to welcome are not the strong and mighty, those whom people admire and respect. They are also counted among the most vulnerable members of the community, the “little ones” for whom a cup of cold water is a gift. We won’t earn respect from society for our generous welcome of these guests, but we will be reminded that the Mission of Jesus is only possible through the strength of God’s grace.

In this radical, costly welcome we will know the companionship of Jesus of the One who sent him. This is the primary relationship which transforms our priorities and the way we live our lives.

Response

Are you comfortable accepting that you are part of Jesus’ Mission.
In what ways are you involved?

What does welcome of those involved in mission, mean for you? What people do you stand with? What agencies have your support? How is your welcome evident in your prayers and actions?

What accepted cultural norms (powers of this present darkness Eph. 6.12) would conflict with welcoming Jesus’mission?

If I was to respond by welcoming radically the call of Mission, who would be affected and how would I deal with that?

Do you consider your participation in Mission as welcoming Jesus and the One who sent him. How can that awareness transform your welcome?

Prayer

God of transforming welcomes,

who continually reaches out to bring Good News to those who need it

And invites us to participate in the continuing work of Jesus,

May we so act in generosity of spirit, and loving concern for others

That we may become members of your community of grace,

Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Amen.