

## Wesley United Methodist Church

August 18, 2013

“Cups of Cold Water.”

Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus said, “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.” (Mt. 10:42)

In almost 30 years of ministry, I have been blessed and challenged, enlightened and humbled by watching scores of people grow steadily in Christian maturity. And I have come to notice something that heartens me beyond telling: “growing up into the full stature of maturity in Christ” has almost nothing to do with extraordinary spiritual events that change a person in an instant, for all time. To the contrary, maturity seems to be nothing more or less than the daily commitment to be cups of cold water for a thirsty creation. It doesn’t require enormous intelligence or knowledge, or great courage or strength. It doesn’t require cleverness, or ability, or worldly success, or wealth, wisdom, beauty, charm, piety, or purity.

Yet how many of us put off the task of growing in Christian maturity, waiting for the right occasion to offer us an opportunity to be transformed radically? And how many of us pass through day after day, losing opportunity after opportunity, simply because those chances look too small or ordinary to serve as life changing events. But Jesus said, “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.” Jesus told his followers, told us, that the way to discipleship is a way of simply common acts of kindness and compassion. It is a way open to anyone.

We prideful creatures that we are—may be discontent to practice our faith unless we can do so in ways that make us worthy of being nominated for the Nobel Peace prize. But God doesn’t ask such immense things of us. God only asks us to notice one another’s thirst and to take the time to offer a soothing drink.

Last month, while in Germany riding the train with our family, I was reminded of cold cups of water. It was hot and the train was crowded—several of us were standing. A very pregnant young woman climbed aboard, dressed in worn, mismatched clothing. She struggled past several seats full of businessmen and students, some talking on their cell phones or just talking to one another. No one paid her any attention. Partway back on the train, an elderly man got up from his seat and, with a simple gesture, invited her to sit. The train started, and it became clear that the man, while generous, was probably going to be thrown to his knees from the speed. But the situation was solved when a young man, complete with nose ring and droopy pants, stood up from his place and ushered the elderly man back into a seat. Two cups of cold water: the first inspiring the second. Two simple gestures of kindness, each easily within the capability of every person on that train, of every person in this congregation.

Our social structures encourage us to ignore such commonplace attention to one another. A vast cultural shift, powered by the media (the entertainment industry—including movies and music, television, radio talk shows, newspapers, popular literature), have brainwashed us to think and act like the world revolves around us. People are no longer content to care about their spouse or children, parents, friends, neighbors, colleagues because it seems boring. People only feel encouraged to cater to “important people.”

Jesus offers us a different value system, a value system that is neither evident in the movies or on television because it sees worth in every creature. Jesus offers us a model of human behavior; a model of discipleship that seeks to be in relationship with every soul we meet. Jesus reminds us that we matter—you and I--no matter how young or how old we are. Our choices matter--whether we reach out to the tired, pregnant woman on the train or the older man who gave up his seat. Jesus doesn't talk about important or large. He told his followers, told us, that being in community is not about being an

extraordinary person doing extraordinary things that most of us can't manage. It's all about simple, common acts of kindness that anyone can manage.

At the very beginning of Genesis, God says that we are created in God's image. You are created in God's image. That means we are created by God to be reflections of God's world, to be God's presence for one another. And Jesus showed us how to do that.

So, I invite you to think of yourself as a spring of cool water, to think of every word you say, of everything you do, being cups of cool water for someone. When a friend is sad, can you take a few minutes of really focused time to listen to her sadness and to give her a hug? That's being a cup of cool water. When the old man next door is having trouble getting his trash can to the curb, can you stop on your way to work and help him? That's being a cup of cool water. When you walk past a pop can on a sidewalk, can you pick it up and recycle it so that the earth will be a little more beautiful, a little more healthy? That is being a cup of cool water.

Can you hold the door for the woman struggling with a toddler, a stroller, a diaper bag, and the groceries? Can you put a pot of geraniums on someone's front step? Can you teach a Sunday School class so that a tired parent can have an hour not worrying about her children? Can you cook a casserole? Walk a dog for a shut-in? Can you smile at a stranger? Say thank you to the store clerk who rings up your groceries? Or the person who hands you your dry cleaning? Or delivers your mail or newspaper? All those cups of cool water...simple things, the simple things that Jesus did and that he asked us to do.

God does not ask us to be important in our own eyes or in the eyes of the world. God asks us to live faithfully and simply, offering ourselves as cool water for a parched universe. Amen.