

## *Just a Cup*

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher  
June 28, 2020, Matthew 10:40-42

I was talking with a colleague this past week and like all of our conversations now, I asked him how he is doing. How is his family doing? And he told me that his college aged daughter sighed and said, “I long to go back to the time when the word *unprecedented* was rarely used!” I don’t think she is the only one. But I thought of that word, *unprecedented*, when I read today’s scripture. I would imagine that Jesus’ ragtag band of followers living in the shadow of the mighty Roman Empire felt they too were living in unprecedented times. Here Jesus says to them to go and do things that may draw unwanted attention to themselves from the powers that be. More than one of them had a moment of longing, wishing they could go back to the time before Jesus had such revolutionary thoughts. What does Jesus say as this faithful group faces insurmountable challenges of the established order of things? Normally, I use the *Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* as background material for sermons, but I came across a sentence in *New Interpreter’s Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* that is worthy of repeating here, saying, “Jesus is well aware of the vulnerability and danger of this minority, alternative, countercultural group that challenges the Roman Imperial world.” (*New Interpreter’s Study Bible New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* Abingdon Press 2003 p 1763.) What a huge mission in facing these ordinary folks. Jesus assures them that our God and Creator will notice even their smallest act of grace toward others. **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.”

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Early one day in the Stay at Home order, when our sense of humor was still intact, Gregg and I, at a moment of whimsy, decided to buy these T-shirts. United we stand; Divided. I think this best describes our life today. We live in is a series of contradictions. How do we keep the church together, when we need to stay apart? How do we tell our families we love them, but we can't be near to them? We are encouraged to wear masks; it is not for our own protection it is for those who we do not even know. Now Jesus says go and do but we the community of faith say stay at home. We are living with all the dissonance in this time full of contradictions. And yet Jesus does not seem to give any one of us a pass because we are in strange and *unprecedented* times. Jesus is not saying let's wait until things settle down. He does not tell his disciples to wait until the Roman Empire falls or to wait until things are less complicated. Jesus says **now** is the time to go and do.

If you feel that this is so overwhelming that we just should curl up until this is all over, Jesus is telling us that is not an option. Our times today are filled with big things happening that are out of our control. Big changes are happening and we are caught with so many contradictory ideas and instructions swirling around, it is easy to hold back and do nothing. Jesus is prepared for that kind of reaction. He tells his disciples and us to start small. Show **kindness** and **grace** to others.

Jesus gives an example, "Give a cup of cold water." Doesn't that image hit home for us! Many of us watched in horror the destruction of a familiar place on Lake Street. But then, as the buildings were still smoking in ruin, tables were set up and people came not only to protest, but also to provide water and food, to those who were on the front line. Some of our people succeeded in giving not only a cup of water but food and sundries to the people of Lake Street whose grocery stores were destroyed. Small things can turn into great things!

We saw one young man holding back the angry protestors from beating the truck driver who drove into the crowd at I-35 the weekend of the riots. One person held back the angry crowd from taking justice into their own hands and

thus saved a life. Small acts, small steps that do not go unnoticed in a world that is so out of our control:

- A card to one of our younger or older members saying we are thinking of you.
- A phone call, a message or a note -- Christ is calling us
- Wearing our masks and not insisting that it is our inalienable right to infect others.
- Giving food or a donation to VEAP to help unnamed others

We can do these acts because one thing we have learned in this pandemic is that we have to work together. This is not a solitary endeavor; we need to be together in order to save lives. We need to hold intentions that as individuals we need to think of our community in ways that may have never occurred to us in times past. Jesus is counting that we look out for and care for the most vulnerable among us.

There has been no other time in my lifetime when loving our neighbor as been more urgent or necessary. There has been no other time in my memory that loving God is a direct expression of what we choose to do. We love God and our neighbor and so we wear our masks. We love God and our neighbor when we pay attention to the ones who are living alone and are isolated. We love God and our neighbor when we say not yet; we are not going to gather in the church building but we are very much gathering as the body of Christ and are expressing it to the world.

How will we look back on this *unprecedented* time? Will we see it as a bump in our lives and an inconvenience? Will we return to how we have always been? Or will we be changed, deeply impacted by the new ways that we see things? Will we see this time as a disruption that has created heartbreaking losses, which we grieve? Will we see that these times have opened us up to new and uncharted ways to live? The answers are yet to play out. I for one, hope that this *unprecedented* time gives us space to make changes that truly can change the world.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church is just off Lake Street. During the riots, the church people saw a man they did not recognize coming toward them holding a flame. They were anxious for sure. It turns out he was from the Migizi

Center. Their building is one of the buildings destroyed by the fires. The Migizi Center is a not-for-profit organization that supports and nurtures Native American youth and empowers their creativity. Their building on Lake Street had its grand opening this past September. It housed a computer lab for young Native Americans. The burning of their building was collateral damage. This man with his lit flame told the pastor that the flame was taken from the fire of the Migizi building. He wondered if Holy Trinity, a sacred place, could be the keepers of this flame and keep it lit until that day in the future when the Migizi building and Center is rebuilt. Holy Trinity stepped up. Quickly the congregation organized and found cases of long-lasting candles in glass containers and organized two lit candles to be sent to homes to be kept for a week or two and then passed to other members (Lutherans are as practical as Presbyterians). One of the missions of Holy Trinity now is to keep that flame lit until the Center is restored and rededicated. They welcome many lights being lit from this flame.

Think of the contradictions woven together -- riots born of anger and despair causing destruction of property and dreams -- woven into a symbol of hope and unity. Hope of people of different faiths coming together to share the new dream rising from the ashes and something better.

It takes offering a cup of cold water, it takes agreeing to keep the candle burning to change the world not for our own sakes but for Christ's sake. In these ordinary yet *unprecedented* times stay where you are but go and do. Smile at someone who is difficult to love; bring cold water to police officers and protesters. Keep the flame alive for an indigenous community that supports youth as they rebuild.

These small steps are not the end. As we see with the fledgling group of countercultural people daring not to flinch in the shadow of the mighty Roman Empire, small acts lead to more bold acts and grow beyond ourselves and our own meager efforts. However modest or great our efforts might be, they are linked together with Christ himself. Offer a cup of water to one who needs it, show grace to a person who is angry and struggling, listen to a story that is different from your own. Become part of the movement to change lives in the direction of God's love. As Christians living in unprecedented times, that is what we do. Thanks be to God. Amen