

TFTD 23.13: A cup of cold water: Matt 10.242



Jesus said, If anyone gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, I tell you the truth, they will never lose their reward. Matthew 10.42

“Poor dear, you look fagged to bits.” It was a hot Monday in July, and I was sitting on the tram in Sheffield heading home after a day’s work. It had been a long hot day of meetings (we were appointing a new lecturer, I seem to remember). And yes, I was tired — and it showed. The old lady’s smile and sympathy were as refreshing as a cup of cold water — just what I needed.

It was also —as it happened — the very first time I had gone to work wearing my clerical collar. The day before, I’d been ordained deacon in Chester cathedral, then been “sworn in” in my new parish at Evensong — quite a day! And then — back to work as usual on Monday. Except not quite as usual: round my neck was this weird plastic collar that said something public about me. What had happened that Sunday meant that my

faith could never again be just a private arrangement between me and God: it was something that would make a difference (for good or ill) in the world I live in.

Whether or not you wear a clerical collar, being a disciple of Jesus has implications for the way we live in the world. The potential for ill is of course enormous: wearing a cross, or a fish badge on your car, really makes you think about the impression you're making if your behaviour is rude, or arrogant, or just plain indifferent. "What would Jesus do?" is always a good question to ask ourselves.

In this chapter, Matthew gathers together a whole lot of Jesus' teaching about what it means to be a disciple. Being a disciple (v.1) means becoming a "learner," sitting at Jesus' feet to learn the ways of God's Kingdom. But it also means becoming an apostle (v.2), sent out (v.5) to put that learning into practice, commissioned to follow Jesus in making God's Kingdom a reality in the world (10.1) — and empowered with Jesus' authority (because the kingdom of heaven can only come about through God's action, God's energy). And you don't have to wait until you know everything before being sent out! Learning and doing go hand in hand in the school of Jesus.

But it's a daunting task. This first mission is limited to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (v.6). Eventually, Jesus' mission will reach out to all the nations (Matt

28.19) — but it starts with friends and neighbours down the street. And that's a lot of towns and villages to get through (v.23). It takes time and patience to get alongside people, eating their food and accepting their hospitality, building up trust — time, and patience, and a lot of walking. So you need to travel light, and be prepared to move on if nobody's listening.

And there's no guarantee that anyone will listen. They didn't listen to Jesus — why should they treat you any differently? (v.24) The marks of faithful discipleship, says Ulrich Luz, are the marks of the church: poverty, itinerancy, defencelessness, and love. Being faithful in following Jesus means preaching the Word and putting the Kingdom into action — even when it leads to opposition, suffering (vv.17ff), and (ultimately) the cross (v.38).

But Jesus says, “Don't be afraid” — three times in this chapter. There's no such thing as a cheap life. Even the smallest of creatures (like those two-a-penny sparrows in v.28) is held in the Father's hand: every life is precious to God. “Don't be afraid.” The secret is not that bad things won't happen to me and my loved ones — but that when bad things happen, those hands will still be holding on, holding and loving them, through life, and death, and eternity.

And that evening in Sheffield I learned something else. Being tired and vulnerable is an authentic part of our

lives as disciples. We love to be able to give: but there's also a grace in being on the receiving end, learning to accept the kindness of strangers (just as Jesus did: see John ch.4). Jesus said, "Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me" (Matt 25.40). Sometimes just being there in the name of a disciple may be creating an opportunity for somebody else to be a blessing in the name of Christ.

May God bless you in your discipleship today!
Loveday

Collect for Edward King (March 8)

God of peace,
who gave such grace to your servant Edward King
that whomever he met he drew to Christ:
fill us, we pray, with tender sympathy and joyful faith,
that we also may win others
to know the love that passes knowledge;
through him who is the shepherd and guardian of our
souls,
Jesus Christ your Son our Lord: AMEN.