

## Wesley United Methodist Church

July 2, 2017

“A Cup of Cold Water.”

Matthew 10:40-42

Baron De Rothschild was one of the richest men who ever lived. Legend has it that the Baron once posed before an artist as a beggar. While the artist, Ary Scheffer, was painting him, the Baron sat before him in rags and tatters holding a cup. A friend of the artist entered, and the Baron was so well disguised that he was not recognized. Thinking he was really a beggar, the visitor dropped a coin into the cup.

Ten years later, the man who gave the coin to Rothschild received a letter containing a bank order for 10,000 francs and the following message: “You one day gave a coin to Baron de Rothschild in the studio of Ary Scheffer. He has invested it and today sends you the capital which you entrusted to him, together with the compounded interest. A good action always brings good fortune. Signed, Baron de Rothschild. A simple act of kindness was rewarded.

Now hear the words of the Lord: Matthew 10:40-42

“God so loved the world that he gave...”

One day, a student asked anthropologist Margaret Mead for the earliest sign of civilization in a given culture. He expected the answer to be a clay pot or perhaps a fish hook or grinding stone. Her answer was a “healed femur.” The femur, of course, is a bone in the leg. Mead explained that no healed femurs are found where the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest, reigns. A healed femur shows that someone cared. Someone had to do that injured person’s hunting and gathering until the leg healed. The evidence of compassion, she says, is the first sign of civilization.

At the heart of Christian faith is compassion. How will they know we are Christians? By our love. Christians do not live by the law of the jungle but by the law of love. Great Christians have always been great givers.

John Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century, was one of the most powerful preachers in church history. Yet he devoted more time and energy to the poor than preaching. He established many Christian charities, hospices, and hospitals for the destitute.

John Wycliff, who translated the New Testament in English, led grass-roots movement of lay preachers and relief workers who ministered to the poor.

General William Booth was a Methodist preacher when he started the Salvation Army.

Dwight L. Moody, one of the best known of all pastors in America, established more than 150 street missions, soup kitchens, clinics, schools, and rescue outreaches. The Christian faith is about giving.

We only have to survey the ministry of Jesus to see that. There was nothing self-serving in anything he ever did. He was truly the man for others. And he called us to be people for others.

We are so privileged—most of us. We have so much. We sometimes forget how little many other people in this world have. There are people who would prize even our cast-off items, who would be grateful to eat what we throw away. A cup of cold water...

It matters to Christians that there are people in need—not just because we are nice people, but because there was a time when we were in need. We are the recipients of grace. God loved us when we were helpless and undeserving. So we look around for others who are helpless and perhaps even undeserving so that we may pass on the love we have received.

You may have noticed that the Scripture we read at the beginning of this message was not about giving to the poor, but giving to those who are engaged in the work of God. Jesus says, “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me... And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.” The little ones he is referring to are those ordinary people he has sent out to do his work.

Remember, Christ was sending his followers out into a very cruel world. Often, they were totally dependent on the kindness of strangers in the lands which they visited. “Remember,” Jesus is saying, “when you receive one of them and help them and give them even a cup of cold water, you are giving it to me.”

As your pastor, I never apologize for asking you to support the work of Christ through the church. It is actually the highest privilege I can give you. After all, you never know what kind of good can come out of even the smallest gift.

There was a story about a church group who bought Christmas gifts for a missionary family. After meticulously selecting the presents based on the family’s needs, sizes and ages, the group gathered to pack them. That’s when another member whisked in and plopped an almost-new man’s coat on the table. Her husband didn’t like the style. As she turned to go, she suggested that maybe the missionary family could use it.

Several people were offended. The coat wouldn't fit anyone in the missionary family. Obviously, the woman hadn't given it much thought or time to the project. But the other presents didn't completely fill the barrel they were packing. So, someone folded the coat and stuck it in. It made perfect packing material.

After Christmas, A thank-you letter arrived from the missionary family. They thanked the church for their many gifts and especially for the "miracle" gift. It seems that, during a storm, a destitute man knocked on their door. He was so ill dressed for the cold, they invited him in to stay until the storm passed. Even though the visitor would have no gifts in the barrel, they decided to open it. That's when they discovered the coat. It fit the man perfectly.

Do such things really happen in the world? Yes, they do—all the time. You never know when you give that cold cup of cold water--whether to the needy stranger or to the work of God--how that gift may be used.

Jesus said, "And whoever in the name of a disciples gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward."

Some people are afraid to give their money, their time, their talent, their life to God because they think they will lose what they give. Unfortunately, they don't understand God's economy. They don't realize that God works just the opposite. What you give you will keep, for God will give it back to you.

That is what Jesus is saying to us about the cup of cold water. Christian faith is about giving. Giving to those in need, giving to the work of God. But no gift is ever given in vain. What we give will be returned to us many times over. We have Christ's word on it.