

PENTECOST 4 YEAR A
JEREMIAH 28:5-9
ROMANS 6:12-23
MATTHEW 10:40-42
JULY 1, 2, 2017

I saw on the news the other day that Terry Branstad began his appointment as Ambassador to China. As ambassador, his place is to be the presence of the United States in that place. His job is to work with the Chinese government representing our country and our values. In some ways he is our voice but he is the one that will represent our country in China.

Matthew 10 is about Jesus sending his disciples out as evangelists. They are called apostles and were sent to represent Jesus and because they represented Jesus they would also represent God. Jesus taught in the previous verses that they would encounter difficulties and people may reject them but they were to remain faithful. Since they were to be representatives of Jesus they would need to remain faithful to their calling. No matter what they might encounter they were to remember that God gets first place in their lives. Their relationship with God must remain ahead of all other relationships.

Matthew 10:40 “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

The disciples would be sent out. Their ministry included sharing the Good News that the kingdom of heaven is coming near. If we read the gospel of Matthew we come to know what is involved in this ministry. The apostles will need to trust where the Lord is leading them. They will need to trust that the teachings of Jesus are good teachings and they are the words that bring rewards and even eternal life. Jesus sends his disciples out to share the word of the Lord. He sends them as ambassadors to various places. They will go but they represent Jesus and because they represent Jesus they also represent God.

As we hear this teaching and as we are sent out we are faced with a tremendous responsibility. The work of the Lord is a difficult work but it is also a rewarding work. We teach and preach in church about serving the Lord and about doing God's will but we are sent from this building into the world. We are sent out to bear witness to Jesus Christ. When people see us they must also be able to see Jesus Christ. How does this happen? How can anyone see Jesus just because I am present? When I wear my clergy collar people know I am a pastor or a priest. That collar causes people to talk in ways other than they might talk or act in ways other than they might normally act. I don't even need to speak and people know what my clothes represent. What about when I am at the YMCA or other places wearing normal clothes? It is interesting the number of conversations I become involved in. People seem to know that I am a pastor even when I am not in church or wearing a clergy collar.

I am usually careful about what I say and what I am doing because I know that people see Jesus when they see me. They also see the church when they see me. If I fail to practice what I preach the witness is lost. If I teach our children one thing and then do something else they will not listen to the teaching. If I ask you to volunteer to do a ministry task but they fail to come along side you the witness is lost.

The same is true for each of us. Many times people know that you are people of God without you saying anything. People see you and know who you belong to based on your attitudes and behaviors. They hear the words that come out of your mouth and see what you are doing and know that you are disciples of Jesus Christ. If you welcome others in the name of Jesus you have welcomed God.

Matthew 10:41, 42 **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; ⁴²and 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 teaches that each person in the body of Christ is important. A prophet, righteous person and one that gives a cup of water are each important. Each has a place in the church. The body of Christ is made up of many people each having a part. You do not need to be a pastor to share the ministry of the Lord. In the time of Jesus the prophets were celebrated as those bringing a word from God. They brought words of warning as well as words of encouragement. If we look at the reading from Jeremiah 28 we see the witness of one who is a true prophet and the one who was the king's prophet. Jeremiah was the true prophet that gave the difficult message of exile and of struggle of God's people. The prophet Hananiah spoke of a short time in exile and the people would return to Judah. Jeremiah's prophecy was consistent with that of those that came before him. Hananiah's message was to be a feel-good message that was not according to the true prophets from God. Those that are called righteous are those responsible to provide justice, healing and restoration of relationships. Those that give a cup of cold water are those that care for the poor and the needy.

Jesus teaches that the ministry we are called to is given power and authority by God as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus declares that they are sent out in the power and authority of God. They will represent God in all that they do. Jesus tells of these ministry items as welcoming others. Being a welcoming people is at the heart of every relationship in these verses. Jesus is not just pointing in a general way of the importance of being welcoming or of showing hospitality. Jesus points to the importance of welcoming prophets because they are prophets. They can expect opposition and violence. Jesus shares the importance of welcoming the righteous as those who work for justice sometimes risking their lives as they do their work. Jesus also teaches about welcoming those that offer a cup of cold water to the little ones in the name of a

disciple. These tasks are welcoming others. They are bearing witness to Jesus Christ. Matthew does not tell us what the rewards are for serving God. The reward isn't eternal life because Jesus did everything necessary for our salvation. We know that Jesus died on the cross and rose again that we would have life. I believe the reward is being received or welcomed by others. It is sharing the word of God and the message of salvation and receiving the blessings that come with it. We welcome others into our community of faith as we prophecy, work for righteousness and as we serve others.

You and I are ambassadors for Jesus Christ. Since we represent Jesus and the Father we also live our lives as Jesus instructed. Our reward is the blessings that come with serving the Lord. Our reward is knowing the Father because of the Son and it is drawing closer to the Lord because he drew closer to us.

AMEN