

Devotional Blog

Sunday 28th June

Even in the midst of this dreadful pandemic good news items have been fighting through. We have enjoyed the astounding fund raising feats of Captain Tom; the campaigning zeal of young footballer Marcus Rashford; and the powerful image of Patrick Hutchinson, the black personal trainer, carrying fireman style an injured right wing protestor to safety at a demonstration at Waterloo station.

Delightfully they all have received a reward, be it a knighthood, a U turn in Government policy on Summertime school meal vouchers or some incredibly positive media coverage.

It feels right to be rewarded for kindness, doesn't it? Oh, but wait a minute, that's not the Christian way, is it? Aren't we saved not by any of our actions but by God's grace? Look, for example, at Ephesians 2: 8 "For by Grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is a gift from God".

Yet if we look at the very end bit of the Missionary Discourse in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 10:40-42) it all seems to be about being rewarded for our hospitality. What is going on?

Jesus concludes his briefing to the disciples by picking up on an old Jewish idea that to receive a person's envoy or messenger was the same as to receive the person themselves. It's the Jewish principle of Shaliah. This challenges us to think more deeply about what is meant by welcoming one another. It means that whoever welcomes any follower of Jesus in effect welcomes Jesus. Our compassionate hospitality or welcome is a form of service to Christ.

Even the provision of a cup of cold water will not go unrewarded! This may seem to set the bar exceptionally low until we remember that in a hot country in Jesus' day a cup of cold water meant a trip to a deep well carrying a heavy jar. Hospitality often involves sacrifice.

Now, that issue of the reward. Let's recall the famous story in Joshua Chapter 2 of Rahab. She is a fascinating woman. She is a prostitute, a Canaanite, and a very good liar. She hides Joshua's spies in her house in Jericho and goes on to make a confession of faith in God. This brave act of hospitality produces in her a mustard seed of faith. We know from the Bible that Rahab is both one of King David's great grandmothers and has a place in Jesus' family tree. So, providing a welcome and hospitality produces and increases faith; and it is our faith and the Grace of God that saves us.

Mother Teresa would constantly remind us that every day we encounter Christ in "distressing disguise" in those "hungry not only for food but hungry for love".

Yes, of course, we know of heroic deeds by Christians, but Jesus is saying that also ordinary acts of kindness matter too. All service ranks the same with God. Let's take the love we have for our close family, that love for our closest community and extend it, and extend it further and further still.

Running through this message about hospitality is the powerful idea of our union with Christ. We are personally united with Christ through faith and the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul routinely refers to this relationship as us being "in Christ". The amazing fact is that we become Christ to others.

But it's a two-way street. Those who give us hospitality and welcome us are acting as Christ to us. Normally we make a clear distinction between those we understand as the object of our charity and those who have something to share for the sake of our faith. Can we imagine the homeless or the chronically hungry as bearers of the

Christian message. The fact is that many people who hold no status in consumer society and come to us in need are , in fact, people of deep and abiding faith.

So, let's add to our amazing fact: we have it in us to be Christ to each other, to work miracles of love and healing as well as to have them worked upon us. Now that really is good news.

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