

“Can’t Do Everything? Do Something!”

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Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 10:40-42

Theme: Service; compassion; hospitality

Occasion: Pentecost 2

It was Jesus’ expectation that his disciples should be hospitable. He said, “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” I would suggest that showing hospitality and demonstrating compassion, is the first step in Christian discipleship.

The famous anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked this question - “What is the earliest sign of civilization in any given culture?” The questioner expected the answer to be a clay pot, or perhaps fish hook or a grinding stone. Her answer? She replied, “A healed femur.”

The femur, of course is the leg bone above the knee. 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 said, is the first sign of civilization. I would contend that it is also the first sign of the work of Christ in the life of a Christian. Hospitality has fallen on hard times these days, but it shouldn’t be that way in the church. Jesus pointed out that even the smallest act of kindness shall be rewarded.

Sometimes we compare ourselves to those who have great amounts of wealth, to contribute to the needs of others. When we see how little we have to contribute, we may think to ourselves, “What’s the use?” It is staggering to think of the personal wealth of someone like Bill Gates. He is worth billions of dollars. He

and his wife, Melinda, have started a foundation that is contributing over a billion dollars to charity, primarily for education and health. None of us will come close to making a contribution of that magnitude.

Jesus, however, recognized that there are various levels of kind acts. “Those who help a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward,” Jesus said. He added, “Those who receive a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man’s reward.” Then he says, “and if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones (referring to those who help his disciples), I tell you the truth,” he concluded, “he will certainly not lose his reward.”

A small gesture to be sure, a cup of cold water, but none the less important. Because , and here is the significance: the act of giving that cup of water indicates that the person is open to the message of the disciple. “He who receives you, receives me,” Jesus said. Here’s the point: **In the small act of kindness is the large act of receiving the Gospel of Christ.** (Repeat)

At Annual Conference two weeks ago, we had the honor of having Rev. Shane Stanford, author and pastor from Memphis Tennessee lead Bible study. He is a hemophiliac who contracted AIDS as a young adult as a result of a contaminated blood transfusion. He is a survivor, and a well known speaker on the topic of ministry to persons with AIDS.

He tells the story of meeting a young woman who had a promising medical career, one of the few daughters from her African tribe to be able to attend university. When she went home from Europe on break, she discovered that her parents had contracted AIDS. Within months they died. She was left to care for her siblings, several brothers and sisters. Soon, they too contracted the AIDS virus.

She quit her medical career to care for her family. But the suprising turn

came when one day there was a knock on the door, and standing outside were several more children, orphaned because of the AIDS epidemic in Africa. She took them into her home. And the word spread, and soon she had over a hundred children to care for.

One night, when she couldn't sleep, she talked to God, asking Him what she was supposed to do. She told the Lord, "I can't save the whole continent. What do you want me to do?" And the answer came back, "If you can't do everything, do something."

From that moment on she cared for her siblings and the other orphans, living day to day, trusting in God to provide the things that they needed. Now to me, what she is doing is a miracle, and I think, "How could I ever do something like that?" When I pray to God, do you know what he tells me? "If you can't do everything, do something."

Rev. Stanford put it like this. "We can't do everything. The reason we can't do everything is that we aren't wired for it. We are supposed to be a fellowship working together. If everyone does their little something, then you can accomplish great things."

I like that message. I can't change the world, not by myself. But I can do something. So I will. You can't change the world, not by yourself. But you can do something. And when we each do our something, it builds a momentum of compassion and love. It shows we get the message of Jesus.

"And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of the least of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.

Some years ago, Sam Foss, a writer and traveler, came to a little rustic house

in England situated at the top of a hill. Nearby was a signpost that read, “Help yourself to a cool drink.” Not far away he found a spring of ice-cold water. Above the spring hung an old-fashioned gourd dipper, and on a bench nearby was a basket of summer apples and another sign inviting the passerby to help themselves.

Curious about the people who showed such hospitality to strangers, Foss knocked on the door. An elderly couple answered, and Foss asked them about the well and the apples. They explained that they were childless. Their little plot of ground yielded a scant living, but because they had a well with an abundance of cold water, they just wanted to share it with anyone who happened by. “We’re too poor to give money to charity,” said the husband, “but we thought that in this way, we could do something for the folks who pass our way.”

That’s the kind of hospitality that Christ had in mind. It’s a simple thing, “a cup of cold water.” But it’s more rare than you might think. And you know what? Showing kindness to strangers is what the Gospel is all about. It’s not about us; it’s about them.

You and I can’t do everything. But we can do something. Another of the guest speakers at Annual Conference was Bishop Sally Dyck of Minnesota. She said, “If you want to change the world, change a life. To change a life, you have to build relationships. And you have to have a servant’s heart.”

She went on to say, “Everybody wants to change the world, but nobody wants to teach Sunday School. The way to change the world is to do it one day at a time. It’s in teaching Sunday School, working with the youth, caring for others, or doing volunteer mission work, that relationships are built, that can change lives.”

How about you? Have you bought into the message of Jesus? Have you begun to do those little acts of kindness that help to change the world. Not the really big ones, like

giving a billion dollars to charity. But the little acts of kindness, like teaching Sunday School, or helping a neighbor, or giving to No More Malaria? Or simply offering a cup of cold water?

Jesus says that the smallest act of kindness will not be missed by a Father who is watching. And those who offer even a cup of cold water will receive the reward of a prophet. **You** can't be Jesus. **You** are not the Savior of the world. **You** can't do everything. So do **something**. And great is your reward. Amen? Amen!