June 29, 2014

Matthew 10:40-42 (The Message)

Acceptance

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Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Matthew 10:40-42 The Message

“We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God’s messenger. Accepting someone’s help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it. It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won’t lose out on a thing.”

It is hard for me to believe that I have been the pastor at Greenland Hills for almost an entire year! This year has flown by. I had been serving part-time as an Associate Pastor for 7 years while the kiddos were young and my youngest was going to be going into kindergarten and more importantly, there was not funding for my position at the church where I was serving. So, I called my District Superintendent and told her that I was available for a full-time position. This was in January 2013. Then, I heard nothing. In early May I got a call from the District Superintendent and she said that the Bishop was thinking about sending me to Greenland Hills, but they were not quite sure, because they are lots of smart people at Greenland Hills. I am not kidding you. My memory is that she said something like they were concerned about my preaching because I did not preach very often, maybe 4 times a year, and Greenland Hills had all of these SMU type people and there are lots of smart people here. My response was sort of um, umm, well, I attended Greenland Hills a few times when I was in seminary and Kathleen Baskin was the pastor and she told lots of stories and I tell lots of stories. The District Superintendent did not seem to be very swayed by my argument and she said that she would let me know.

It was hard to sleep for the next couple of days. I never thought that I would be asked to the pastor at Greenland Hills. Yes, I had been a Senior Pastor before but that had been 7 years before. I had preached every week for 5 years, but I was definitely out of practice. And Greenland Hills did have smart people here! Dean Kirby, Dr. Wood, Dr. Joe Allen and Bert Affleck! And Kathleen Baskin was amazing, she did not use notes when she preached and I cried every single time she preached because she would tell stories that touched my very soul. And Marti Soper was on the Board of Ordained Ministry, she was one of the ones who decided who could be a pastor. I was just little old me.

I heard nothing for a week and a half. Then, the District Superintendent called me on a Wednesday afternoon and asked if I was available the next evening at 6 pm. I said yes. She asked if my husband Lee was available. I said yes. Then, she said she would call me back. That was the extent of the conversation. I had no idea what church I was supposed to go to the next day to meet the SPRC, the personnel committee of the church.

The next morning I had not heard anything so I texted the District Superintendent. No response. Around 3 pm I called and the District Superintendent and I had a lovely conversation. I remember asking her what church I was supposed to go to that evening and she said Greenland Hills. She told me about how young the congregation was here. You really are quite young. She told me about how many children there were and about the new building. So, evening came and I dressed to impress. I had on a skirt and a pretty pink shirt and my husband Lee wore a fleece. It was a nice fleece, but I looked fancy. And we came into the building and we met Rick Wright. And Rick looked at us both, me in the pretty outfit and Lee in the fleece and said, “So, which one of you is going to be our new pastor?” Lee said it was definitely not going to be him.

I remember driving my kids by the church and it was the Saturday of the Preschool’s Spring Fling and there was a petting zoo and they were very excited. They did not believe me when I told them that there was not a petting zoo at the church all of the time. Our first Sunday my now 10 year old daughter was out of town, I think on her annual trip with her grandparents like she is now, and she said that she did not like our new church. I asked her why thinking that there was something that I could change or fix and she said that the sanctuary was not as big as the one at our old church. I told her that there was nothing that I could do to change that. In the past year I have loved getting to know more about each one of you, and I now know that Dean Kirby is Jim and Dr. Wood is Chuck and Dr. Allen is Joe. I have grown in my faith alongside you and I feel so blessed to be a part of your lives.

When I read the scripture for this week, I thought about beginning my second year as the pastor at Greenland Hills, and I thought about how thankful I am for your welcome. Thank you for your kindness, your generosity, your love, and for your forgiveness and grace when I have messed up. I know that I have done that a lot. My first Sunday after I said the closing prayer, there was a lot of movement at the back of the sanctuary and the children rolled down a red carpet that Rick Wright had and everyone started blowing bubbles at me. I did not know what was happening, it was like I was getting married! It was an amazing welcome and something I will never forget. I definitely felt welcomed!

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible verse that we shared together says, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” But in the Message translation that we read instead of saying welcome it says acceptance. The Greek word in that verse can be translated as receive, accept, welcome. I choose to read the Message this morning because I like the idea of acceptance better, for me it is more powerful. I was not only welcomed when I came to Greenland Hills, but I was accepted for all that I am. All of my faults, all of my quirks, all of me was accepted.

A little over a year ago Greenland Hills decided to become a Reconciling Church, to symbolize that welcome that is Greenland Hills. All are welcome and accepted here, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. I want to worship God at a church that resembles the kingdom of God where all people, single, married, widowed, gay, straight, brown, black, white, all are accepted as God’s children. When all are welcomed and accepted that is transformational because it is the full expression of Christ’s inclusive love. It is grace, love, justice, and inclusion for all of God’s children.

I love being a Methodist Christian because the first Methodist, John Wesley, felt a personal responsibility to make the world a better place. And he did that by giving abundantly. In John Wesley’s sermon “The Use of Money” in 1744 he said, “Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can”.[[1]](#footnote-2) In the scripture we read it says, “This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it. It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty.” When we follow Jesus we are drawn into relationship with God through the acts of mercy that we perform and are performed on our behalf.

We often imagine discipleship as requiring huge sacrifice or entailing great feats, and sometimes that is exactly what discipleship comes to. But at other times, Jesus seems to say, it’s nothing more than giving a cup of cold water to one in need. Or offering a hug to someone who is grieving. Or a listening ear to someone in need of a friend. Or volunteering at the local foodbank. Discipleship is the small acts of devotion, tenderness, and forgiveness that tend the relationships that are most important to us. Except that, according to Jesus, there is no small gesture. Anything done in faith and love has significance for the ones involved and for the world God loves so much.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Do you know Loren Eiseley’s story of the star thrower?[[3]](#footnote-4) “Once upon a time, there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He would walk on the beach before he began his work. One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw someone moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up. As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean. He came closer still and called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?" The young man said, "Throwing starfish into the ocean." "Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" asked the man. "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die." "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!" And the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. And he said, "It made a difference for that one.”

Last week I talked about huge numbers of unaccompanied children coming to America as they flee gang violence in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Yesterday, Judge Clay Jenkins had a press conference to say that 2,000 of those children will soon get temporary relief housing in Dallas. No other city or county has volunteered to help house the growing number of unaccompanied immigrant kids. Judge Jenkins said, "We can't help all, but we can help some." And he hopes that by Dallas acting, other counties will volunteer.[[4]](#footnote-5)

We do not have to save the world, Jesus has promised to do that, but we can care for the little corner of the world in which we have been placed. We can welcome and accept everyone we meet because everyone is God’s previous child, loved by God. And a cup of cold water can make a huge difference.

You all have given me a cup of cold water, you have loved me and loved my family and I am so thankful. You care for those who are hungry by volunteering at the Emanuel Community Center food panty on Tuesday mornings. You teach the children and the youth that they are loved by God. You open the doors of this church for preschoolers who can learn about God who loves them. Thank you for all the countless ways you make this world God loves so much a little better, a little more trustworthy, a little more joyful through your gestures of love, mercy, and compassion.[[5]](#footnote-6)

You have brought cups of cold water, hugs, helping hands, and listening ears to your workplaces, to your coworkers, and to your neighbors. To give hospitality is a divine gift  and to receive hospitality is a divine gift. And when we welcome and accept and offer a cup of cold water we bind those who offer welcome with those who are welcomed.

1. http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-50-The-Use-of-Money [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3265 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.amazon.com/The-Star-Thrower-Loren-Eiseley/dp/0156849097/ref=sr\_1\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1403992829&sr=8-1&keywords=star+thrower [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://trailblazersblog.dallasnews.com/2014/06/clay-jenkins-announces-plan-for-county-to-house-up-to-2000-children-from-texas-border.html/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3265 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)