



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Matthew 10:40-42

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ 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, ⁴² and 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.”

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

It is only two little scriptures! You would think I would be able to discern the message Jesus is attempting to convey but there is no aha moment. I’m thinking I need a bit more information or at least a Jesus glossary to make sense of this.

For instance, the word “welcome” is mentioned five times. Typically, the Greek word translated as “welcome” refers to the loving hospitality of *agapaō*. However, in this text, the word translated as “welcome” is *dechomai*, which means “to receive.”

So, does Jesus mean for us to welcome or to receive? I think of welcoming someone as an act of hospitality. I welcome someone into my home for instance, and I step aside so they can enter. I give them access. I say welcome.

Try the word receive instead of welcome and you will sound like a geek. “I receive you.”

“Welcome” works well as a greeting, but the word “receive,” not so much. The real intent appears almost too simple to apply when it comes to Jesus’ call to stand in solidarity with a dangerous “prophet” or a vulnerable “little one.”

Next is the word “reward.” Jesus does not say what the reward will be for welcoming or receiving someone. He simply says that if you welcome or receive a prophet, you will receive the same reward as the prophet. Disliked by his friends and families and perhaps, murdered by unreceptive power freaks?

Now on to the blanket term “little ones”—children, the homeless, the innocent, and the vulnerable people of the world. What does it mean to give a cup of water to one of these little ones and to do it in the name of a disciple? I just do not understand what that means, please help me, there are rewards at stake!

There is a prophet's reward, and a reward for the righteous. There is also a reward for a cup of water given to a little one as long as it has the name of one of your favorite disciples. Get all twelve disciple collector cups today!

Though he is not a disciple, let me be Frank. I listened to several bible experts, and they did not provide clarity beyond assumptions. Nevertheless, let me add my name to those who are making desperate attempts to fashion a touchpoint on Matthew 10:40-42 this Sunday.

If we look at the word *dechomai*, it does not simply mean to receive someone. It carries the sense of reaching out a hand. A person extends hospitality unabashedly, offering acceptance and inclusion despite the consequences.

In this case a person like a prophet who speaks uncomfortable and inconvenient words of warning or a messenger of God speaking truth to power. Connecting and associating with the least of society by giving them a cool cup of water for their thirsty soul.

Those who reach out a hand *are* the very hand of Christ extended in solidarity with the disciples.

Perhaps we are the extension of all that Christ is in the world, whether to a prophet, a child, or a righteous one.

This is a massive piece of scripture for the followers of Jesus to be the blessing and extension of God. By doing so, we are invited to participate in God's divine nature.

This totally fits with what I believe to be our aim in this life: to participate in God's divine nature. These two short verses in Matthew are a stunning epiphany for anyone who desires intimacy with God.

To experience a peace that passes all understanding and a sense of divine acceptance is staggering to the heart of Love's desire. To participate in God's divine nature is for my welcoming hands to become an extension of Christ's hands in the world. Is this not the reward?

I found the following in a little book by spiritual director John Dear called *Universal Love, Surrendering to the God of Peace*. It chronicles the unfolding mystery of universal love in his sessions with his directee Willam.

Will did not believe in God, so the two of them settled on the term "Universal Love." One day, John challenged Will to spend thirty minutes a day in silence. He also

suggested that he ask Universal Love to be with him and speak to him. Will agreed because he felt that meditation would be good for cultivating a well-rounded life.

Here is how John describes Will's report back after many days of practicing a time of silence.

"He said he had been sitting in silent meditation every day and had been focusing on his breath, so that he was sitting very still and breathing consciously. Then, one day he became overwhelmed with a sense of peace and joy that he had never known before. He felt he was in the presence of universal love. He had simply never had an experience like it. Will cried while trying to describe it."

Is this perhaps the reward—a peace and joy that defies and transcends all earthly things?

It stretches through every label such as prophet, child and disciple. It connects all of us in such a transcendent way that our deep longing to belong is satisfied communally. It leaves religious ambitions in the dust and bridges the divides of senseless hatred and separation.

To extend our welcoming hands to the vulnerable truth-tellers and the little ones of the world, to honor those of character for their devotion, and then to extend a hand of grace to the fallen—these are acts of partnership with Jesus. It is a life lived on God's terms, not my own. It is an experience, not a set of beliefs.

Perhaps this ineffable experience IS the reward that embraces every moment of receptivity and transcends beyond any word or interpretation of Matthew 10:40-42.

Amen

