

The background of the entire image is a close-up, high-speed photograph of water. It is filled with numerous small, clear bubbles and larger, more complex droplets that catch the light, creating a shimmering, textured effect. The color is a deep, vibrant blue, with lighter tones near the top where the bubbles are more concentrated.

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The Reward of a Cup of Cold Water

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Sermon text. Sunday 28th June. Pastor Wilkins.

The Reward of a Cup of Cold Water

Text: Matthew 10:40-42

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Year A)

May grace, peace, and the joy of heaven come to each of you, from God our loving Father and from our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Cup of Cold Water in the Heatwave

Brothers and sisters, in the last few days England has had a rare heatwave. Some parts went above thirty degrees. For many people here, this kind of heat is not normal. Most homes have no air conditioning. Our buildings were made to keep heat in, not out. So many people could not sleep at night, and felt tired and dizzy in the day.

In these few days, we saw again how precious small things are: a cup of cold water, a shady place, a kind question. Maybe you said to someone, "Drink more water," or "Let me get you a cold drink."

A cup of water seems like nothing on a normal day. But in the heat, it became a gift. It became care. For someone in need, it even became life.

This is the right moment to read the last words of today's Gospel again: "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." (Matthew 10:42)

Jesus did not say, "Do some great and famous thing for me." He said, "Just a cup of cold water." Because in the kingdom of God, love is not measured by how big the act is. It is measured by this: did we see the person's need? Did we see Christ in them?

It Is a Gift, Not Wages

Before we talk about this cup of water, we must ask a deeper question. When Jesus promises a "reward," what does he mean?

This matters. Because if we are not careful, we will hear this passage as a deal. As if we hand over a cup of water, and now God owes us something back. As if we do a little more, and we earn a little more in God's eyes.

But Paul closes that door in Romans chapter six. He says we were all once slaves of sin, and the end of that road is death. But through Christ, we have been set free. Then he says it as clearly as possible: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Notice the two words. Wages are what you earn. They are what you deserve. And what sin earns is death. A gift is a different thing. A gift is given freely. Eternal life is not wages. It is a gift.

So when Jesus says, “will certainly not lose their reward,” he does not mean pay that we earn by our works. He means something God gives freely. And the gift is God himself, here with us.

Once we understand this, we can read the rest correctly. All the serving, all the welcoming, that cup of cold water: none of it is a way to win a reward. It is the natural response of people who have already received grace.

The Ones Who Are Sent

Today’s reading is only three verses. But we must look back at the whole of chapter ten. There, Jesus chooses twelve disciples and gives them authority to heal and to drive out evil spirits. Then, for the first time, Matthew calls them “apostles.” The word “apostle” means “one who is sent out.” They do not go by their own idea. They are sent by Jesus, to represent Jesus.

In Jewish culture there was an important idea, called Shaliah. It means a person who is sent, an agent. The rabbis had a saying: “The one who is sent is like the one who sent him.” Think of a king who sends a messenger to another country. The people must welcome the messenger as they would welcome the king. Because he does not represent himself. He represents the king.

This is why Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me.” (Matthew 10:40) This is not just a polite saying. It is a spiritual truth. The disciple represents Christ. And Christ represents the Father. So how a person treats the disciple is how they treat Christ. And how they treat Christ is how they treat God the Father.

This is also a great comfort. Jesus knew that not everyone would welcome his messengers. Some would reject them. Some would hurt them. He said, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.” So to those who are sent, he promises: Even if the world rejects you, you are not alone. Even if you suffer for the Gospel, you are not alone. Because the one you represent is Christ, and Christ stands behind you.

To welcome a disciple is to welcome Christ. To welcome Christ is to welcome the Father. The greatest reward is not wealth, success, or health. The greatest reward is to receive God himself.

A Cup of Cold Water

At the end, Jesus turns our eyes to a group that is often overlooked. He speaks of “these little ones.” Who are they? Jesus does not explain. Maybe they are young disciples, or weak believers, or poor Christians. Maybe they are people who seem unimportant, ignored by the world. But Jesus says: in God’s eyes, they matter just as much.

The heatwave helped us see again the value of a cup of cold water. On a normal day, we turn on the tap and think nothing of it. But in the heat, a cup of water takes away thirst. It brings comfort. It makes a person feel loved.

Jesus chose, on purpose, this small and ordinary act to explain the law of the kingdom. In the kingdom of God, it is not only great ministry that is remembered. A cup of cold water, a word of comfort, a meal, a visit, a moment of company: each of these can become a sign of Christ coming into someone's life.

And this can cost us. When Matthew's Gospel was written, the church was being persecuted. To welcome a Christian was not safe. A cup of cold water looks small, but behind it there may be a cost of time, of money, even of life. This is why Jesus says, "He will surely be rewarded." Every act of love is remembered by the Lord.

James says it too: faith without actions is dead. But be careful. This does not mean we are saved by our works. Salvation is a gift, not wages. A true faith is simply a faith that turns into welcome, into service, into a cup of cold water. Our actions are not the price of grace. They are the fruit of grace.

So What About Us, Here in England Today?

The disciples were sent out among wolves. What about us? Let us be honest. In England today, most of us will not preach on the street. We will not be arrested for believing in Jesus. Our "wolves" appear in more ordinary places.

In the office, a workmate talks about the weekend. Do you say, naturally, that you went to church? At the family table, a relative asks how you are. Do you dare to say, "God has been very good to me lately"? At the school gate, do you quietly leave out the word "faith"? A neighbour is going through a hard time. In your heart you want to pray for them. But the words reach your mouth, and you swallow them back.

The law has never stopped you from saying these things. What stops you is not the police. It is something else. It is not prison bars; it is the fear of feeling awkward. It is not persecution; it is the fear that people will think you are "too religious." It is not the sword; it is one or two seconds of silence, and a look on their face you do not want to meet.

This is a softer pressure, but it is just as real. It will not put you in prison. But it is enough to make you keep your mouth shut, and hide your kindness away. Maybe we all carry a rule in our hearts: faith is private, so keep it inside. This sounds very "tolerant." But really, it pushes God out of public life: out of our friendships, out of our tables, out of our daily living.

Brothers and sisters, this is our test today. The apostles faced a threat to their lives. We face only the cost to our pride, our comfort, and being misunderstood. But the question from the Lord is the same for both ages: Are we willing, for the sake of Christ, to pay that cost? Even if it is only to hand a thirsty person a cup of cold water, and to add one sentence: "I will pray for you."

The Baton Is Now in Our Hands

Two thousand years ago, Jesus handed the Gospel to the apostles. The apostles handed it to the church. The church handed it to believers in every age. Today, this baton has been handed to us. We too are sent.

We may be rejected. We may be misunderstood. But we are not alone, because Christ is with us. And when we serve, let us remember: we are not earning anything for ourselves. We have already received God's gift for free. We are simply sharing the grace we received.

Because in the kingdom of God, no service is too small. No offering is forgotten. No cup of cold water is given in vain.

The Lord says: "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." (Matthew 10:42)

Brothers and sisters, look! The baton of the Gospel is now in our hands. Christ is with you. The Father is with you. The Holy Spirit is with you. What are we still waiting for?

Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: the holy name of the one true God, three in one. Amen.