

July 2, 2023 5th Sunday after Pentecost

On this national holiday, it is fitting to acknowledge our history and the path to reconciliation and right relationships. Christians see themselves as reconciled and reconciling people, so today we hear the words from the land acknowledgement for this region—modestly adapted to our worshipping community.

Niagara Region is situated on treaty land. This land is steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hattiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today.

May we people of faith join The Regional Municipality of Niagara as they stand with all Indigenous peoples, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live.

Matthew 10:40-42

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

SERMON

Is a cup of cold water such a big deal?. Ask people in Northern Ontario whose water supply isn’t safe to drink. As parts of the world experience killing heat, a cup of cold water could save a life.

My mom tells a story about being hospitalized years ago when she experienced delirium. Alert nurses quickly determined she was dehydrated so, IV fluids and later a cup of water aided in her recovery.

Then the empire gets its grubby hands on things....Years a documentary reported about a global food corporation that bought up local water supplies and then bottled the water to sell...turning water into yet another commodity.

These vignettes, while about water, speak to something more —if I may use a wonderful, but overused word, existential.

The way of the empire is transactional; everything's for sale to the highest bidder. The rich build a system that enriches them and impoverishes everyone else. The way of Jesus is the reign of God. Kindness is a major ingredient in God's realm...St. Paul mentions it as a fruit of the Spirit. It's in play when Jesus sends out a group of people he calls prophets, righteous, and even "little ones". He tells them they'll meet both hardship and welcome. When these disciples are welcomed it's as if people welcome Jesus himself and even the one who sent him.

I like how the preacher and teacher Joy J Moore describes a circular understanding of Jesus words. Jesus welcomes us, we welcome his teachings and Him. As this happens, we welcome others...and again it's like we're welcoming Jesus. As the cycle repeats, the circle expands.

Later Jesus would say nations will be judged by how we welcome and care for the least of these; those who thirst, hunger, and live without shelter-and how we receive those who are persecuted and those seeking refuge. St. John Chrysostom, known for his preaching, puts it like this: "If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find Him in the chalice".

In our congregations our statements of purpose employ words like “welcome” and “sharing”. As First and St. Matthew’s entered into a call process for a new pastor, they identified three conditions in the community that we might be called to address—Unemployment, homelessness, and substance abuse and addiction.

We might feel overwhelmed by these conditions and think there’s nothing we can do to help. Yet, these words from the Dalai Lama come to mind, “if you think you’re small, try sleeping with a mosquito.”

Maybe we can put to work that image of a cup of cold water...something that seems small yet has life giving consequences.

What might our neighbours need... things that seem little to us—a warm or cold drink, socks in the winter, a coat, access to washrooms and showers, somewhere to launder clothes.

I am convinced that each one here acts with kindness every day and you might think your actions are no big deal...Let’s remember that Holy Trinity’s breakfast program, sharing food every day of the year—averaging some 90 meals a day —began with one kind conversation.

One cold morning, Jim Butt noticed someone who had slept outside and now woke up agitated...”are you hungry?”, Jim asked. The difference that something to eat made for this person inspired a program many here support financially and some serve breakfasts for.

That’s how Jesus’ stories about mustard seeds pop up in life...intentional kind acts add up. Cups of cold water, a breakfast bar, a sandwich, even a kind word signal the reign of God...God who says to us all, “you are seen. You are known. You are loved”.

