

40 "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." (Matthew 10:40-42)

Here are the disciples, the twelve of them, listening to Jesus' final instructions as told by Matthew in today's Gospel. It concludes the second major part of Jesus' teachings. This is building up, to the great commission at the end of Matthew's gospel;

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28: 19-20).

The disciples are getting ready. Jesus has been preparing them. It's like, when you have booked that holiday, and all the plans have been given. All the details of the itinerary are completed, the information is printed off, and your luggage is packed. You like the disciples are ready to go, Then, someone said, have you got your passport? The final important identification that allows you to be welcomed and received throughout your journey. The one thing that gives you safe passage as you travel. Jesus' final instructions to the disciples are that important. These instructions are the disciple's passport. And that is what is at the heart of today's gospel reading. Jesus's instruction on being welcomed as you spread the Good News.

The word welcome is repeated six times in today's gospel by Matthew. So, this is an important word. The Hebrew meaning of welcome translates to include the word, "receive". To receive implies a cost, a transaction. When a disciple is welcomed by a person in today's gospel reading, they are also received, by the person. It's more than a welcoming hello, nice to see you. It was an offer of hospitality, kindness, love and support. It's transactional. There is a cost. When Jesus spoke these words to the disciples, the disciples would have understood that to be welcomed by someone, also included being received by someone. And in this receiving was an offer of hospitality, kindness, love and support.

I have felt this welcoming and receiving that Matthew is talking about. So many times, already in this parish of Applecross Anglican Church, I have been generously welcomed and received. And it's much more than just a hello. I've been welcomed in friendship, and I have received generous love and support. I have been welcomed as a third-year formation student in training. And Reverend Wendy has given me time, teaching, patients, and love in my learning. The welcoming and receiving feel

like one blended action, a package deal. One does not exist without the other here in this parish. As a community, the Church has been formed out of welcoming and receiving. It is much more than a simple hello. We welcome and receive by giving and sharing of our time, love, contributions, and finances.

Each Sunday together we are welcomed and received at church. We are welcomed at the parish door by welcomers and then receive a service booklet that guides us through the service. As service begins, we are welcomed with, "The Lord be with you," and is received by the response of, "And also with you." This welcoming and receiving continues throughout the service in liturgy, prayer, and song. And it goes much deeper, as we are welcomed into the Great Thanksgiving, we receive Holy Communion together. This welcoming and receiving brings us into communion with God and with each other. With the bread and wine, we reach out our hands to receive and God welcomes us into his holy space. We are consecrated, sanctified made holy and acceptable to God through welcoming and receiving. Following the service, we are all welcomed to morning tea, to share and receive food and drink together. We are a community that welcomes and receives.

So, returning to the disciples and looking at today's gospel reading; this teaching, by Jesus and retold by Matthew. This final instruction of welcoming and receiving is not mentioned in the other Synoptics of Mark or Luke's gospels. So why has Matthew recounted these words of Jesus? We may never really know. But what we do know is that this Christian action of welcoming and receiving is a fundamental feature of our churches today. We welcome, we receive. We know. That the disciples are right on the verge of going out and spreading the gospel. They are at the passport stage of being ready. And Jesus said; *"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me"*. Jesus' final instructions to the twelve disciples shift the focus from the disciples to the people who welcome and receive them. The people who are hearing the Good News that is being preached by the disciples. The listeners are the indicated welcomers and receivers for the disciples. Not all people who hear the Good News are going to respond by welcoming and receiving. I'm pretty sure, plenty were opposed. And, we know this, as many of the disciples were imprisoned, hurt, harmed and even killed in preaching the Good News of Christ. This was dangerous for the disciples. The disciples needed to recognise and discern those that welcomed the message of Christ's salvation, as they were the ones who would receive the disciples and offer hospitality, kindness, love and support.

So how can we today take this gospel reading and apply it to us as disciples? Recently, Reverend Wendy shared the beautiful words that St. Teresa Avila who wrote;

*"Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which*

*He walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which
He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which
He looks compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours."*

St. Teresa Avila explains this so well. It's doing what we do. It's welcoming and receiving through kindness, compassion, love, and caring. It's as we live and walk, help and heal, see and love those around us as in our daily lives. It's in the doing of Jesus' actions. It's the being of Jesus to those around us. It is this beautiful cycle of love. As we share God's love, people receive God's love. As people receive God's love, they share God's love. Only our God could create such a master plan. It's renewable and has no end. And it's God's gift to us his disciples in welcoming and receiving. This most wonderful gift of welcoming and receiving was designed by God, told by Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit, written by Matthew, and lived in us. It is a master plan and our passport. To welcome and receive someone is this open generous invitation, and when given from the heart, has no cost at all.

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