Scripture reading: Matthew 10:40-42

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our gospel test for the past couple of weeks has taken us through Jesus talking to and commissioning his disciples to continue the ministry that he had begun with the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

We heard just 2 weeks ago, from our gospel text that after the disciples had witnessed the healing ministry of Jesus, Jesus instructed His disciples to go and do the same.

And we heard just last week that this ministry he was giving them wouldn’t be easy. It wouldn’t be easy because not everyone who heard the “Good News” and experienced the presence of God in their life really wanted to hear it.

Jesus warned his disciples that they might be persecuted and that some people might react with violence against them when they acknowledged Jesus as Lord and carried through with his ministry of humble service.

But still, in spite of all these risks, we also heard, last week, Jesus tell his disciples to be faithful and to pick up their cross and follow him and to not be afraid.

This was because everyone of them were precious in Jesus’ sight and each one of them was well known by God, the Father in heaven.

And today we have the final words from Jesus about the ministry He had placed on His disciples.

And from these words this morning Jesus lets us know that persecution is not the only result of discipleship.

No, not at all, in fact, Jesus informs his disciples, that they would come across people that loved God and who would honor the people that God sent to them.

Jesus explains that these folks would welcome them like they were welcoming him and like the one who sent him and that they would receive their reward (for their act of welcoming will not go unnoticed).

And because they welcomed and accepted you they too will now have the reward of participating in Christ’s ministry.

So, just How do we participate in the ministry that the Lord has given to us

Matthew records Jesus having said, in verse 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.”

Throughout Jesus’ ministry here on earth he spent a lot of time teaching his disciples how things work in the kingdom of God?

Jesus provided for His disciples examples of how they could carry out the ministry his Father had given to him.

One example of this we read from Matthew 25: 31-40.

It reads “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of glory. All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

Jesus wanted his disciples to know that when they reach out to the less fortunate with a hand of compassion, and with a hand of mercy, and with a hand of acceptance, they are in fact reaching out to him.

This doesn’t have to be something big, or extravagant, or difficult.

Sometimes it may be just a cold cup of water given in the name of a disciple.

I’m reminded from our gospel text of the motto of our church—The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) that reads:

“God’s work, our hands.”

Our church’s mission: “Together in Jesus Christ we are freed by grace to live faithfully, witness boldly and serve joyfully.”

And our church’s vision: “A world experiencing the difference God’s grace and love in Christ makes for all people and creation.”

Wayne Wold wrote a song for “God’s work, our hands Sunday” which is being observed on September 10th, 2023.

The first and last verses of the song read:

“God's work, our hands: working together,  
building a future, repairing the world,  
raising up homes, planting new gardens,  
feeding the hungry and sheltering the cold. Bless, God, our hands as we work in your name, sharing the good news of your Gospel.

God is at work in and around us:  
seedlings are sprouting and bread's on the rise! Washed and set free, humbled and honored, gifted by grace, we respond in God's love. Bless, God, our lives as we answer your call, sharing the good news of your Gospel.”

God has given us an example of how we can share His love with others through the gift of His Son.

Jesus said: “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.”

Please pray with me a repeat after me prayer:

“Almighty God…

your Son Jesus has taught us…

that what we do for the least of your children…

we also do for him…

Lead us, guide us, and show us, how to serve others…

as he was the servant of all who gave up his life for all…

Giving all abundant life…

In Jesus’ name we pray…

Amen.