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5 Pentecost, Year A
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Being Kind Needs No Reward

*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.”
Matthew 10:40-42*

When we read the gospels that tell the Good News of Jesus Christ one thing that becomes very clear is that Jesus does a lot of sending out of his disciples who become instant apostles. A disciple is one who follows a teacher or rabbi, and an apostle is one who is sent – the word literally means a person who is sent.

Sending out implies not remaining in place hoping that others will go come to you, but you go to them. I think of this every Easter morning with the powerful symbol of the Empty Tomb. The Risen Christ did not call his followers back to the tomb but met them on the road, on the shore of the Lake they all knew all too well, and in the houses where they once gathered.

We may have to enter spaces that may be unfamiliar even hostile. Jesus knew all of this. We heard two Sundays ago: As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Matthew 9.

You and I are still being sent out in the world. Ritually we say: “Go in peace to love the serve the Lord: let us go forth.” If we wanted to update that rather churchy language, we might say instead: “Let’s get out of here!” or “Hit the road.” Thanks be to God! We have to believe that Jesus’ words to his followers are meant to be lived out as best as they can by each one of us today, otherwise why are we here? We too are Christ’s envoys and ambassadors. As we go deeper in our faith where we go when we are sent and how we live reflects what we value and care about.

Today we hear Jesus saying: 40“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” It is reciprocal. When we are welcomed, Christ is welcomed, and God is well pleased. The door is opened.

As I move about in my daily life and routine, like many of you who drive over the same roads each day, one begins to notice small things. I notice if a house goes on sale. I pass by

a house that has fresh eggs for sale near the road, on the honor system of course. I go by one house that is painted the brightest color yellow imaginable – it practically glows in the dark at night. At one bend in the road, every day on my way into Exeter, I see a yard sign that says: “Be kind.”

New Hampshire loves its yard signs. With a presidential primary looming, we are likely to see an ocean of them on our yards over the next year. Regardless our political leanings it would be hard to argue with the universality and goodness of the message of a yard sign that simply says: “Be kind.”

A favorite blessing we use from time to time at the end of service is one based on the words of the Swiss philosopher Henri Frederic Amiel.

Life is short,
 And we do not have much time
 to gladden the hearts of those who
 travel with us.
 So... be swift to love,
 and make haste to be kind.

In a few words, this blessing sums up what we know to be true.

Life, regardless of how long we live, is short when matched against the span of the universe and age the mountains, rivers and valleys that form the earth. There is a tree in Chile, South America that is 5,000 years old.

Living each day then knowing that our days truly are numbered -- that each day is a gift – can remind us to consider how we travel through this life and relate to those we meet along the way.

How many times have we probably said: “life too short for this senseless disagreement argument.” Life is too short...

The gospel speaks of reward.

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.”

When someone goes missing or a crime is committed, we might hear that a monetary reward is posted for information that leads to finding the lost person or those responsible. The prevailing wisdom is that by offering a reward, some people may be more motivated to come forward.

What is the reward for doing God's will? Should there be a reward for being kind?

A reward: (Britannica Dictionary) definition is money or another kind of payment that is given or received for something that has been done or that is offered for something that might be done.

I would like to believe that the reward for gladdening the hearts of those who travel with us, being swift to love, and being kind, is not that we will also be encouraged, loved and be dealt with kindly – that is often out of our control.

In Jesus day the so-called reward for those who were sent out was rejection, persecution, and suffering. If that was the reward, how many other walked away and said count me out?

Jesus said: 'give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.' Luke 6:38

Some you may be familiar with Kent M. Keith's The Paradoxical Commandments that he wrote when he was only 19 as a student at Harvard. (The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council.) We know of the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, but this list became known around the world after Mother Teresa posted them in her children's home in Calcutta. These are eight of the ten that she posted.

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.
Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.
Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.
Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.
Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway."

This is what the author said when he learned that Mother Teresa has posted his commandments. “Jesus said that there are two great commandments—to love God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. So, in the final analysis, it is between you and God, but it is also between you and “them.” And when it comes to them, Jesus made it clear that we have to love people and help people anyway. We can’t give up on them or ignore them or write them off. That is the point of the Paradoxical Commandments as well. We find meaning when we love and help people, no matter who they may be, or how difficult they may be. We find meaning by loving and helping them anyway.”

That is our reward. Connection. Meaning. Love. Faithfulness.