

## **JESUS' TIPS FOR APOSTLES: RISKY BUSINESS**

**MATTHEW 10:42-44**

**JUNE 26, 2005 – ANNUAL MTG., MAINE COMMISSION, GRAD. SRS.**

**THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

This is a special day. We recognize the hard work and milestone achievement of our graduating high school seniors, commission young people and adults leaving soon for mission work in Maine and follow the worship service today with an annual meeting.

Today is the second of two sermons on Jesus' tips for apostles. We're reading Matthew's account of Jesus sending his disciples into the world to do exactly what they witness him doing: heal the sick, raise the dead, bring hope to others.

An apostle is a disciple sent into the world. It comes from the Greek word meaning 'to send out.' A disciple follows a teacher. An apostle is sent out by the teacher to live like the teacher. Here in Chapter Ten of Matthew Jesus is transforming his disciples into apostles. He is sending them out.

This is something of a 'transforming disciples into apostles' day at Westminster.

Certainly our mission project to Maine fits the description – young people and adults going to rural/poverty stricken Maine to heal the sick, raise the dead and bring hope.

Put yourself in the shoes of those folks in Maine who see this stunning group of people coming all the way from Buffalo to live with them and work alongside of them. Helping make needed improvements to their community.

Won't that heal melancholy and despair, raise defeated spirits, breathe life into their souls again! I can imagine some of our Maine friends saying at the end of the week, 'you know maybe the world isn't going to hell in a hand-basket...as long as there are people like this around.'

Our graduating seniors are going into the world. Many of them off to a new chapter next fall. Beginning another trajectory. New goals, hopes, and dreams.

One question you graduates might ask is what is it that is 'sending' me on my way. What propels me into this new world? I don't mean only the love and support of parents or your aspirations to achieve your dreams.

What I'm asking is, are you going as an apostle. Are you meeting not just your own objectives but God's objectives for your life, our community, and world? You too are Jesus' representatives. You too have the power to heal the sick, raise the dead, bring hope. Through your academic major, your social life, campus outreach, God will be inviting you to breathe life into broken hearts and struggling communities.

Finally, at annual meeting time we would do well as a congregation to look back over the year and ask ourselves how are we doing in the sending-out-of-apostles department. I think we do a good job at so many things – teaching, fellowship, benevolence.

How have we done sending people out as apostles into their neighborhoods and schools and offices to heal the sick, raise the dead and bring hope? A litmus test for that question might be for each of us to ask ourselves today, 'where am I on the disciple-apostle spectrum?' What or who sends me out into the world?

So does Matthew set the stage this morning for seeing what we do and who we are from the lens of apostolic ministry. I'd like to look at two tips Jesus offers today to those twelve disciples years ago.

Jesus' first advice is for them to see their being sent from the perspective of the rabbinic principle that "the representative of a person is like the person himself."

Jesus says whoever receives you receives me and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.

What those folks in Maine are doing, what those children we tutor here at Westminster do, what anyone we relate to as an apostle does is to open their hearts not just to us but to the one who sends us – Jesus and God.

The child being tutored, the folks in Maine, the colleague at work may not be consciously aware they are receiving the one who sends us as an apostle but that is what happens. In receiving you, they receive the one whose image is indelibly imprinted on your soul.

We are each of us carriers of God's life and spirit. It helps to be cognizant of that. Just last night I attended a small dinner hosted by a member of our congregation. There were some local luminaries present. The host asked if I would say a blessing for the occasion.

I was glad to. I knew that I was there not just as Tom Yorty but as God's representative. It makes a difference the way you deport yourself. Remembering who sends you into the world affects your behavior. I don't always remember that I am God's representative, not by a long shot. But when I do it helps me be a better apostle.

Jesus' second tip for apostles is quite unexpected. Here he is telling them that they have the power to heal the sick, raise the dead and bring hope to the world and then what does he say? He says by giving a cup of cold water to someone who needs it you, as an apostle, fulfill your assignment.

You could see their eyes open wide. Watch the wheels start spinning. Finally, one of them, maybe Peter, says, 'OK Jesus let's get this straight. We've given up our homes and jobs. We've calloused our hands in the business of healing and exorcism. We've angered some of our old friends and family for doing this and now you tell us all we have to do to be a good apostle and not lose our heavenly reward is to give a cup of cold water to someone who is trying to hold on to life?'

'You got it,' says Jesus, 'a cup of water given to a parched throat will do the trick just as well!' This is vintage Jesus. The best for last. The big surprise. Could it be that such a miniscule act, such a small gesture as giving a cup of cold water to someone who needs it has eternal significance? Yes, it could, and yes it does says Jesus.

And so in one phrase at the end of his instructions to his apostles, Jesus reminds us of the power of the small. It is not an easy concept to grasp, especially here in America. We like things big. We equate good, better and best with big, jumbo and super jumbo.

Yet, isn't this where our sense of powerlessness comes from. Thinking that we have to wield massive amounts of resources to dent the world's darkness and make a difference.

I love Walter Wink's comment that 'there is no such thing as objective powerlessness. Our belief that we are powerless is a sure sign that we have been duped by the powers of darkness. For the powers of darkness wish to appear invincible, they do not want their vulnerability to be revealed. They hire public relations firms and savvy handlers.'

But if you think about it the entire bible is based on the power of the small. From Abraham and Sarah to Moses and Miriam to those motley disciples to nerdy, quirky Paul, God overcomes the powers of darkness with misfits and nobodies.

Example after example. Nineteen year old, acne-faced Moses, keeping his father-in-law's sheep – he couldn't even get a real job! – Moses confronts the most powerful ruler and army in the world. Gideon's defeat of the Midianites – an army of 35,000 rendered helpless by the shrewd maneuvering of 350 brave soldiers. The poor widow in Jesus' parable harassing a powerful judge to win her way at last.

Jesus wants his apostles to remember the power of the small as they set out. One small act of kindness, one word of support, one gesture of assistance can change the world.

Any self respecting social or political strategist must ask, "what is Jesus thinking? Why didn't he recruit more educated and committed scribes and Pharisees? Why not the best and the brightest of Israel? Why does he risk his whole ministry on these slow-to-get-it, slow-to-action fishers, farmers and tax collectors? Most of all why does he rest his case today on the sufficiency of the small and insignificant?

In this 100<sup>th</sup> year of the discovery of the theory of relativity there may be a clue in Einstein's physics. Einstein theorized that photons, the tiniest particle of the atom, are more powerful in smaller not larger waves. Their energy and power increases with their frequency or rate of oscillation.

You can see this principle in the figure skater who pulls her arms inward to her body in order to spin faster and more powerfully. She literally makes herself smaller to go faster.

Thus, the energy contained in a single atom of hydrogen is infinitely powerful when unleashed in fission. This is by now an old idea in science but it is also at the core of the bible's understanding of social change as well.

I do not mean to imply that we don't need significant resources to do God's work. I will mention briefly at our annual meeting about the exciting action our session took this past Wednesday to launch our mission and capital projects. This will require all of us to give much of our time, talent and treasure. There is an important place for large resources. But we ignore the redeeming power of the small to our great loss.

There is one more important thing to remember. Jesus doesn't mention it in today's story but that I want to call it to your attention.

As you go out remembering you are God's representative and those who receive you receive the one who sent you; as you remember that in the smallest acts of kindness are powerful deeds of transformation and change something else occurs.

You will become more able, confident and effective. If you look at the disciples before, during and after their time with Jesus – they become increasingly bold and visionary in their work.

From cowering at the sight of the religious authorities those first disciples move to taking on Caesar.

This is not the principle of 'practice makes perfect' at work. It is the principle of letting go and letting God. The more we do this, the more of our lives we give to God, the more of us God has to work with, and the more God is therefore able to do, as we invite the power that created and sustains the universe into new arenas and relationships and decision-points of our lives.

Becoming God's apostle is risky business. It is truly an invitation to transformation. Transformation of your life, our community and a world of darkness into light.

If we let God send us into the world neither we nor the world will ever be the same again. Amen.