

Albany Presbyterian Church

June 28th, 2026, Matthew 10:40-42, Jeremiah 28:5-9; Compassionate Welcome.

For a few Sundays now, we have been reflecting on discipleship, reading through Matthew 10, where Jesus sends out his twelve disciples. Giving them the authority to proclaim the Kingdom of heaven, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, and drive out demons, Jesus sends them out with a very specific instruction.

“Do not carry any gold, silver, or copper in your belt, no bag for the journey, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a staff”

“Wherever you enter a town or village, seek out someone worthy and stay in their house until you leave that town. If people welcome you, let your peace rest on it; if not, let your peace return to you, leave them, and shake the dust off your feet.”

Jesus warns them, saying, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves, indicating the vulnerability the discipleship entails. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On my account, you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.” Not only that... “brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. “If anyone who loves me more than their father or mother is not worthy of me.” “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

But Jesus says, “Do not be afraid, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.”

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Do not be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows; none of them will fall to the ground outside of your father’s care.”

And finally, “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” (verse 40)

A few days ago, I caught up with a friend who had just walked the Camino de Santiago. As you know, this originated in the early 9th century and is regarded as one of Christianity's pilgrimages, alongside those to Rome and Jerusalem. The idea is that you walk hundreds of miles on foot and spend time in solitude, reflection, and prayer. She spent almost 6 weeks walking the trails with other pilgrims from many different countries. She showed me the numerous stamps in a small booklet, which she received each day and at each place. She also showed me a backpack. I remembered how she had talked about her Camino walks before. She wanted to know how she might live on the bare minimum. She practiced walking for weeks and months leading up to this. She had a knee problem, which meant she had to go to physio many times before this. A few days before her departure, her eyes played up, and she was diagnosed with retinal degeneration. Her family was worried about her, and they almost talked her out of going. Near the time of her departure, a war broke out, and Dubai airport, her transit point to Spain, was forced to close.

She said that when she was on the Camino, immediately she was overwhelmed with joy, and her knees were strangely fine and her eyes were fine. She walked almost 8 hours every day, alone, and she did not know anyone, but she said that, though at first she was among strangers, they soon became her friends, confidants, and a community. She said they were not all believers, but many were seekers. Amazingly, she experienced genuine hospitality from this group along the way.

It got me thinking about what Jesus meant when he said, “whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes the righteous person, will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple will be rewarded.”

Christian hospitality should not depend on a reward, as that would be insincere and transactional. Hospitality with strings attached is not “do not let your left hand know what your right hand does.”

Jeremiah said, "The true prophets will be proven when the things the prophet says come true." This, of course, comes in a completely different context. In the early days of the Babylonian invasion, there were the prophets of

the Lord, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, who prophesied about the war, the days of suffering and judgment, and life in captivity. And then there were those like Hananiah, claiming that they were the prophet of the Lord, saying completely different things. Jeremiah rose in response, here in chapter 28, gently correcting Hananiah the prophet, who was falsely representing God by saying what people wanted to hear, out of fear of people and even the king, not fearing God, not being truthful.

Emily Townes, a commentator on Matthew 10, says that Jesus speaks of genuine, compassionate hospitality that goes beyond personal gain. The hospitality comes when we come to know the true meaning of God, who welcomes us. And that we welcome as we are welcomed.

And that our welcome involves approaching others through God, recognising that authentic human relationships arise from centring our lives and all relationships on the grace-filled hospitality of God's love.

Secondly, God's hospitality teaches us to value close, loving, and lasting relationships as much as distant, occasional, or difficult ones, despite the challenges or even danger they may pose. This dynamic—sometimes lively or maddening—is the welcome Jesus describes in this passage. “Even those times when it appears that hatred has won, compassion grounds itself in a double paradox of love: love can lead to tribulation, which then leads us to greater love. With this in mind, we must remember that God's grace continues to act in and through this situation, including the crucifixion that was followed by the resurrection.”

Lastly, a compassionate welcome is integral to discipleship. It is a spiritual discipline that involves opening ourselves to unfamiliar and unknown people, enabling us to recognise their gifts, vulnerabilities, and needs. This process broadens our perspective, offering fresh insights and new stories of faith. Through this openness, we invite the Spirit of God to inspire, change, and transform our hearts and souls.

Yet, we live in times of fear, fearing the unknown, living in scarcity, oftentimes see even those who welcome others find comfort in being at home, able to help those in need — the little ones — and allow “them” to enter “our” world on “our” terms, as long as “we” stay in control.

The friend said that on the Camino, all became saints and pilgrims, helping each other and offering help wherever there was need. I think this is why the walk is a powerful metaphor for the life Jesus calls us to. In that, it teaches us that none of us is at home, none of us is in control; that we are all on a journey to follow Jesus.

For we rarely enjoy being the dispossessed, being the little ones, vulnerable and dependent on others' hospitality. But as we all said, we are the disciples, the ones who are sent; we are the prophets and the righteous others. We are the little ones of Jesus, meant to be without money or food, with no shelter or clothes, hungry and thirsty.

Therefore, welcoming the prophet and the righteous means you recognise that you, too, are called to follow Jesus on this path; you, too, are prophets; you, too, are the righteous. Helping the little ones of Jesus is also helping yourself.

Seeing ourselves in others, reaching out to one another, hearing what Jesus commands, “Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me; whoever welcomes me, welcome the one who sent me.” And that in our welcoming and being welcomed, we not only welcome Jesus, but also welcome God.

