

Read Matthew 10: 40 -42.

This is the end of a very long section on what the disciples will experience as Jesus sends them out to the harvest of need starting at Matthew 9.35-10.8 from a few weeks ago.

It seems odd to me that Jesus is saying this to the disciples. I mean, rather than the disciples, isn't this the message that the churches to which they are going need to hear? So what does this message *do* for the disciples?

For starters, it lifts their eyes from the hardship and challenges, the possible successes and experiences of their calling to go out and heal, cure, and restore, and sets their starting purposes back in the Godhead itself. "Whoever welcomes *you*," Jesus promises them, "welcomes *me*." Ultimately, they are welcoming God. We do the mission, aid, and service works we are called to because they are invitations for us and for those we minister to— invitations to connect with the very presence of God, to welcome Jesus into our lives and situations for healing, curing, restoration and so much more. The disciples have, albeit imperfectly and wavering at times, welcomed Jesus to lead their lives. Now, as they follow his leadership in word and deed, they will show their trustworthiness to the communities God sends them to—and there by be living and breathing opportunities for God's people to welcome God into their own lives again.

The key to discerning a prophet, teacher, or apostle who comes in the name of the Lord, then, is in what they do—not just what they say. Here are some of the signs:

Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain more than one day; or two days, if there's a need. But if he remains three days, he is a false prophet... But not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet; but only if he holds the ways of the Lord. Therefore from their ways shall the false prophet and the prophet be known... every prophet who teaches the truth, but does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet... whoever says in the Spirit, Give me money, or something else, you shall not listen to him. But if he tells you to give for others' sake who are in need, let no one judge him...

Scholars believe that this focus on character shown in action was especially important in the early stages of Christianity's establishment since there was no formalized ecclesial structure or agreed upon canon. It's also the same sort of posture we see in the New Testament letters.

All of this is to say that attempting to keep the generous spirit of Christ's hospitality and live as proof of promise that his people will welcome his messengers, while safeguarding against abuses and those who would seek to take advantage of goodness, is not a new challenge. Being meek is not the same as being naïve. And the best way to find your way and discern between the invitations that someone is presenting is to look at who they have invited to be the center of their life—if they have welcomed Jesus Christ and the Father, then their life will show itself in the fruits of righteousness; with the Holy Spirit, the way of life epitomized i

n giving “even a cold cup of water to one of these little ones.”

Where in your life this week have you offered a cup of cold water? Has someone brought one to you? Who needs you? How are you needed? This is what God cares about. This is the Good News.

Amen.