

# “... Even a cup of cold water”

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 28 June, 2020

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Karyn Burchell-Thomas

Pentecost 5A

Romans 6:12-23; Psalm 13; Matthew 10:40-42.

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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Do you ever feel at odds with things? Like all the usual things aren't working for you. Like each time you try to do something you think: *oh this is not how I normally do it*. Things have changed.

I imagine a few people might be feeling like that with Covid 19 and being isolated. It's been a while now hasn't it. And it will probably be a while more - and we keep looking at headlines and listening to medical reports and finding out if there's been an increase in the curve in the wider community. And thinking of people we know as they travel around for work and wondering how they're going. And we're needing to go out ourselves and wondering: *is it safe? Or do we think that's okay now?* But things aren't quite the same as they were and they won't be for a while. It may be some time.

I've been reflecting on the reading this week as I think about that. And I see some people may not be coping as well as they used to. And I'm thinking of some different people in different neighbourhoods that I know - feeling a little frustrated that things aren't what they're used to, aren't what they're normally like, aren't what they prefer. And I think back to the readings.

Why did Matthew tell us in the reading about the cup of water? What was he talking about? What was he trying to get across to us? We know that his first century community was mostly Jewish. The Christians, they'd had a conversion experience if you like, or they discovered Christ in their lives while possibly still practicing all the Jewish practices that they had before. That was fine.

And it was a new community based on love and equality - so there were people from all different walks of life: the rich, the poor, the employed, the unemployed, males and females, even children. Now that was pretty radical. All of that was pretty radical. That they'd even be in the same room and talk to each other. They were a new community living differently. Some had given up an old lifestyle to do that. Some continued, but they enjoyed being with them when they could - for worship, for breakfasts, for different times.

And among them there were those that would stand out; that had particular roles to play. They'd taken on some leadership roles. Not always the people you might imagine. Not always the richer or the most educated, but those that had been gifted to be envoys. Envoys for Christ. Envoys for God. Envoys, in those days, were known pretty well. Shaliach was a name that was known to the Hebrews as an envoy.

The envoys would be the deliverer of a message. The message might be written down by their employer and they would take the message. But the envoy was more than a deliverer. They were one that could then defend the message or negotiate the outcome - be a representative. It was as if you were speaking to the person who had written the letter.

So envoys were also known as apostles in the first century. The 'sent ones'. The one who was sent with a message - to reveal or declare something new that was happening in the world and in community. There were also prophets and they too were envoys. You receive them, you receive the one who sent them. That's what Matthew started to talk about. You received them, you received Christ. You received Christ, you received God. They were not God - they were envoys.

Euangelion is another word that we might know through the Greek tradition that has become angel, messenger, envoy - all used at that time. So I can imagine that some of the people in this new community - as they were finding their way in this community of equality that was not their normal custom that they had become so used to because it was so freeing and life-giving to everyone - we're still looking around and thinking: *ah I'm not an envoy, I'm not a speaker. I'm not one of the sent ones!*

So then Matthews talks about disciples. Disciples are followers; the ones who learn from and follow the way of Christ; disciples too as being envoys. It must have been pretty startling for some to hear that when they felt, you know, not quite in the same place they used to be, on unfamiliar ground, in unfamiliar territory, in a world that was changing all around them -for the better, in many ways, as they experienced this new life in Christ, following the way - but still challenging.

How could they commit to the way of Christ in the way that others had? They weren't great speakers necessarily. They weren't envoys in their own understanding. Then Matthew talks about the one who even gives a cup of cool water to another as being equal to the Prophet, the Apostle, a disciple, an envoy and in them, you meet Christ and in Christ you meet God.

That must have been pretty daunting and exciting and encouraging for those who couldn't leave their life - they had work to do, they were not travellers, they didn't have the riches and the resources to be able to travel around and be the big speakers in the streets, or make a difference in other people's lives far beyond their own neighbourhood. Each had their own calling in their own way where they were. I think I might have said something like that last week in part of the liturgy.

I wonder then, how we might be feeling as some of us find ourselves a little more constrained than we might otherwise be. How we might feel if we could only get out and see people, or do things a bit differently. Or have we adjusted a little more than we realised?

The cup of water, the cool cup of water to someone in the street might be just what they need. And it's more than a cup of water. It's also saying *I care*. It's also saying *you are loved*. It's also saying *you're respected, you're part of the community to which we are all called in Christ*.

We may be making community a little differently, but the motivation is the same: inclusion, love, respect, freedom, wholeness, abundant life. New circumstances, changed circumstances, but the purpose is the same. May you travel well this week, and may there be many cups of water shared in lots of different forms. God bless you.