

***“Choosing a Braver Faith”
(Matt 10:40-42)
June 28, 2020**

*“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” When Jesus said this, he was using a way of speaking which the Jews regularly used. It’s comparable to showing one’s ID. When you see *this, you should be able to tell that the cardholder represents a particular church, and at the same time its denomination. The same principle applies *when you see these badges. They are recognizable symbols of sacrifice, duty, and service in different regions in Ontario.

*“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” If a person is a true representative of God, to receive that person is to receive the God who sent that person. Furthermore, Jesus applied the same logic to the welcoming of a prophet and the welcoming of a righteous person. And he mentioned an advantage in doing that. Not all of us can be a prophet *like Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Jonah who preached and proclaimed the word of God. Not all of us can be a righteous person, *like Paul the apostle, Martin Luther King, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer who not only did the right things for themselves but also others. Jesus said, *“Whoever welcomes a prophet ... will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person ... will receive the reward of the righteous” which implies everyone could receive the rewards for being a prophet or a righteous person, *simply by welcoming them!

We know Jesus was not trying to establish elite groups *with some kind of hierarchy, like between his disciples and laypersons, prophets and civilians, righteous persons and Joe Blow. He was not putting his disciples, the prophets, and righteous persons *on a higher ranking and asked everybody to become one of them. His emphases were *on the action of **“welcoming”*, and *“who”* could do it.

**Welcomes, welcomes, welcomes, welcomes!* The action of welcoming is so important, and ‘who’ could do it? **“Whoever”!* ‘Whoever’ means any person! And there’ll be rewards. The reward prepared by God is available for everyone. Where can a disciple of Jesus be found? It’s not too difficult to locate one, however, *should we care whether that person is a real disciple of Jesus or a fake one?

The same question can be raised for the identification of a prophet and a righteous person. *Isaiah was a prophet, a priest, and a member of the royal family with a good reputation. Should the Israelites listen to him more than the other prophets then? *Jeremiah was considered by the authority as a traitor of his own country. Should the Israelite disregard what he said? *Jonah was a prophet who attempted to flee from God’s mission. Why would he still be considered a prophet of God at all? *How much do we know about the private life of Paul the apostle, *Martin Luther King, and *Dietrich Bonhoeffer besides the facts that they all committed their lives to what they believed?

To be honest with you, their identities and their beliefs can hardly be confirmed according to any known standards because life itself is so complicated. Even Jesus, we can describe him in *very different ways if we just pick on some parts of his life, like *when he was a lad, he didn't let his parents know and stayed behind in the temple courts in Jerusalem (Lk 2:43, 46); *when he grew up and started his ministry, he didn't tell his disciples and went off to a solitary place (Mk 1:35); *when he performed his first miracle in Cana, he asked his mother to give him some space (John 2:4); and *when he broke the traditional ways of observing the Sabbath Day.

We can't be perfect, that's a fact. It's not that we don't want to, but because it's our nature, we can't be. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Jesus recognized that and suggested a solution here to all who listened to him. *"Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple ... none of these will lose their reward." *Simon Peter wanted to spread the gospels among the Israelites primarily, but Paul wanted to include the non-Israelites. Who was right? Who was wrong? Who can make the decision? No one, and it's not necessary.

Not everybody can provide others *with a shelter for safety, *food for the sustenance of life, or *money for meeting the needs in a rich society. But we all can do something because we are still surviving and living. *"A cup of cold water" looks simple, but it's not. A cup is something we all have. It's only a symbol of whatever we have. It could be a plate, a card, a banknote, or anything. *To use it, not to use it or maybe? Courage and

bravery are required for making that decision. There are so many things to worry about: *What if I misunderstand the situation? What if my offer is irrelevant or insufficient? *Trust your gut feeling. It reflects what you believe. When there's a need revealed to you, think about it seriously, put yourself in someone else's shoes, be compassionate, and take action. That's what it means by *'choosing a braver faith'. The more we struggle with this decision-making process, the more we would learn from the success and failure. Then we know more about *what could be done for 'welcoming', as well as what to offer based on relevancy. *We don't have to offer a cup of cold water all the time, do we? In winter, *it could be warm if not hot. It could be *a little bit more nutritious instead of just thinking about hydration.

*How much do we know about being the marginalized people in society? Do you think you know it? What about those being the most marginalized in other countries? *Like Vadia in India, historically where unmarried women are obligated to support themselves through prostitution; and *Hong Kong in China, where millions of peaceful protesters are threatened and tortured by the armed police force.

In my last two years being a teacher in Hong Kong teaching Mathematics, English, and Christian Education back in 1990, I had a hard decision to make. I had to choose between compliance with the strategy of the school or the nurture of all my students. *The school strategy was to focus its resources only on 15% of the students in order to make a good

reputation for the school. Having a good reputation means having good grades. The result was measurable, The goal was achievable, and I was trained well for that. Why would only 15% of the students be chosen? It's because the rest of the students 85% were having no motivation at all to learn. I chose to spend more of my time with the 85%. I tried to understand who they were, what their ambitions were, how they were brought up, and we had a good time together in those two years. Do you still remember I went back to Hong Kong to pay a visit? I met some of them. Our friendship was still there. They were doing well. It was worth it to go down that route to care for them.

*Our faith is a living faith. It guides us to step outside our comfort zone with a braver love. *It is a faith not in possession, fame, or security, but in the love of God that extends itself especially to the alienated, stigmatized, misunderstood, mistreated, and marginalized. *The love of God is greater than the world's threats. Love everybody that the world rejects. In doing so we are building an expanding family with a braver faith. Amen.