

## Sharing Jesus in Practical Ways Pentecost 4 Rev'd Brian Norris

Matthew 10:40-42

This is a story by Steve Sjogren:

Jared and his dad were playing a game in the backyard one afternoon, when Jared asked, "Dad, is there a God?"

The Dad, Joe, had the same helpless feeling he experienced when he was a member of the high school cricket team when he lost sight of the cricket ball in the blazing sun. He didn't know whether to move forward, back, or just stay put. A string of trite answers raced through his mind. In the end Joe opted for honesty, "I don't know, Jared," he replied.

Yet Joe's agnosticism failed to stifle his son's curiosity. Jared dug a little deeper, "If there is a God, how would you know him?"

"I really have no idea, Jared. I only went to church a couple of times when I was a kid, so I don't know a lot about those kinds of things.

Jared seemed deep in thought for a few minutes as the game continued. Suddenly, he headed for the house. "I'll be right, back," he yelled over his shoulder. "I have to get something." Jared soon returned with a large helium balloon that he had got at the circus the day before along with a pen and a blank card.

"Jared, what in the world are you doing?" Joe asked.

"I'm going to send a message to God – airmail," the boy earnestly replied. Before Joe could protest, Jared started writing on the card, "Dear God, if you are real and if you are there, send people who know you to Dad and me."

Joe kept his mouth shut, not wanting to dampen his son's enthusiasm. This is silly, he thought as he helped Jared fasten the card to the balloon's string. But God, I hope you're watching, he added to his silent petition. After Jared let go of the balloon, father and son stood with their faces to the sky and watched it sail away.

Two days later, Joe and Jared pulled into a free car wash that a church was holding as part of their outreach into the community on a Saturday morning. "How much?"

Joe asked as he neared the line of buckets, sponges, and hoses.

"It's free," the young man told him. "No strings attached."

"Really!" Joe exclaimed. He was intrigued about getting something for nothing. "But why are you doing this?"

"We just want to show you God's love in a practical way."

It was as if that simple statement opened a hidden door to Joe's heart. The look on his face was incredible, "Wait a minute," he practically shouted. "Are you guys Christians?"

"Yeah, we're Christians," the man replied.

"Are you the kind of Christians who believe in God?"

The man couldn't help but smile, "Yes, we're that kind of Christians."

After directing a big grin at Jared, Joe proceeded to tell the story of releasing the helium balloon with its message only days earlier. "I guess you're the answer to one of the strangest prayers God's ever received," Joe said.

So, this is an example of a church that is committed to what they call servant evangelism which may be defined as, "demonstrating the kindness of God by offering to do some act of humble service with no strings attached."

When Jesus speaks of sharing a cup of cold water in today's gospel, he is speaking of the practicality of living the Christian life. Christianity and our relationship with God are personal, but it is not meant to be private. Our life with God is a life that is designed to touch others in practical ways.

So, could I suggest three principles to help us on the way with this:

**PRINCIPLE 1.** DO the small thing to show the main thing of God's love at work.

I once saw an email headed "What would you do?"

You are driving along in your car on a wild, stormy night. You pass by a bus stop, and you see three people waiting for the bus:

1. An older woman who looks as if she is about to die.
  2. An old friend who once saved your life.
  3. The perfect man (or) woman you have been dreaming about in a romantic way.
- Which one would you choose to offer a ride to, knowing that there could only be one passenger in your car? This is one of those moral and ethical dilemmas sometimes used as part of a job interview process.

You could pick up the older woman, because she is going to die, and thus you should save her first; or could you take the old friend because he once saved your life, and this would be a good way to pay him back. However, you may never be able to find your perfect dream lover again.

The candidate who was given the job (out of 200 applicants) had no trouble coming up with his answer. What did he say? He simply answered: "I would give the car keys to my old friend and let him take the lady to the hospital. I would stay behind and wait for the bus with the woman of my dreams."

Never forget to "Think Outside of the Box."/ Jesus' challenged his disciples and us here in Matthew 10 and in other places to do the small thing to show the main thing of God's love at work. In Matthew 10, it is giving a cup of cold water. In John 13, the night before he dies, he washes his disciple's feet and then challenges them to love others. He then makes this observation in John 13:35, Everyone will know that you are my disciples because of your love for each other.

Do the small thing to show the main thing of God's love at work. We never fully know what small act of kindness will touch and transform a life.

John Bowes, chairman of the parent company of Wham-O—the maker of Frisbees—once participated in a charity effort. He sent thousands of the plastic flying discs to an orphanage in Angola, Africa. He thought the children there would enjoy playing with them.

Several months later, a representative of Bowes' company visited the orphanage. One of the nuns thanked him for the wonderful "plates" that his company had sent them. She told him the children were eating off the Frisbees, carrying water with them, and even catching fish with them. When the representative explained how the Frisbees were intended to be used, the nun was even more delighted that the children would also be able to enjoy them as toys.

You never fully know how lives will be touched by a small act of kindness, but God does.

**PRINCIPLE 2.** Understand that simple acts done with great love will change the world. Baron De Rothschild was one of the richest men who ever lived. Legend has it the Baron once posed before an artist as a beggar. While the artist, Ary Scheffer (19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch/French painter), was painting him. The financier sat before him

in rags and holding a tin cup. A friend of the artist entered, and the baron was so well disguised that he was not recognized. Thinking he was really a beggar; the visitor dropped a coin into the cup. 10 years later, the man who gave the coin to Rothschild received a letter containing a cheque for 10,000 francs and the following message: "You one day gave a coin to Baron de Rothschild in the studio of Ary Scheffer. He has invested it and today sends you the capital which you entrusted to him, together with the compounded interest. A good action always brings good fortune. Signed, Baron de Rothschild."

Jesus puts it this way in Matthew 10:42, I can guarantee this truth: Whoever gives any of my humble followers a cup of cold water because that person is my disciple will certainly never lose his reward.

Simple acts done with great love will change the world. Just think how God came into this world. How did he come? Not with bells and whistles, not riding white horses with trumpets blazing, he came as a baby. He touched people at their point of need, not just to heal them physically or to lift their spirits, but to change their lives. He came and gave his life on a cross, to change the world with His love. God was aware we would never get this on our own, so He sent His Son to die for us, His Holy Spirit to lead us to faith and to change our hearts, and people who touched our hearts with His love.

**PRINCIPLE 3.** Realise that your power for service is not based on who you are but who Jesus is through you. At this point we can get caught up in the guilt of not doing enough to show love or feeling bad about how inadequate our love might seem. The challenge is often that we try to love under our own power, and the power to share Jesus in practical ways comes from Christ. Paul knew this, even when imprisoned, he knew and experienced the power of Christ at work, that's why he tells the Philippians "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4.13).

The power of the life we live in love toward God and others flows out of God working in our hearts. Jesus the night before he dies prays for this to happen in our lives when he prays in John 17:21, The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, So they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me.

So, in conclusion, Nike commercials for runners challenge us to "Just do it!" Sharing Jesus in practical ways with a cup of cold water, with a meal, with words of prayer, a listening ear, a ride to the doctor. These acts and others like them are calls to just do it. Yet we need to always remember why we just do it. Our actions flow out of the realization that Jesus did it. He died for us. He gives us life eternal. He empowers us with His presence. He challenges us to live out our purpose not in only the big moments of life, but in all of its little ones as well, even a cup of cold water given in his name. For we do the small thing to show the main thing of God's love at work. We understand that simple acts done with great love will change the world. We realize that the power for service is not based on who we are, but who Jesus is through us.

Simple acts done in love seem so small, yet when we realize God is at work through them, we discover the greatness of sharing Jesus in practical ways. Amen.