

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

June 28, 2026 – 5TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST / PROPER 8, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: *"Small Kindnesses Show God's Love"*

Jeremiah 28:5-9	(A true prophet is judged by the outcome of the prophecy)
Psalms 13	(A plea for God's mercy and praise for God's help)
Romans 6:12-23	(We were slaves of sin; now we are slaves of Christ)
Matthew 10:40-42	(Jesus says: Whoever welcomes a believer welcomes Him)

How long, O Lord? Although the anguished plea from today's psalmist seems to echo across our nation and throughout our world, Jesus is still calling us to compassionately welcome others, and to graciously accept being welcomed by them when it is our turn.

Since the Day of Pentecost our Gospel readings—all part of Jesus' instructions to His followers whom He is sending out to minister in His Name—have called us to think about mission and ministry. Like the disciples, we have received the Holy Spirit; and we, too, should be asking how we can help bring Christ's heavenly kingdom to earth. Today is our third Sunday in Matthew's tenth chapter, which follows the Sermon on the Mount and is titled, "The Missionary Discourse." So far, Jesus has encouraged us to follow the apostles into the world; to proclaim the Good News in word and deed; to move into God's fields that are ready for harvest; and to pray for more workers to labor alongside us. He has also warned us that we will not be treated well on our mission and that living for Christ will create division, even in our own homes.¹

Unlike St. Luke, St. Matthew makes no mention of the actual mission itself. He doesn't tell us whether the disciples went out or what their experience was. Scholars believe this omission is meant to highlight Jesus' instructions as a direct address to the readers. We who are included in the audience are left not so much with an historical report of what occurred in the disciples' ministry, but with a description of that ministry as Jesus wants it to be. As we end our time in this chapter, we learn that our role in Christ's mission is not only as those who are sent out, but also as those who are open to receiving others. The focus is on *welcoming*. Jesus uses the word "welcome" six times in only three verses of this passage, as He points to the importance of kindness in furthering His Kingdom. We are called to consider more deeply what it means to serve one another in love.

As we review the list from verses 40 to 42, we realize that this welcome can and ought to be practiced by us at any time, no matter what circumstances or crises in which we find ourselves. We also come to realize that our welcoming does not need to consist of large, dramatic acts. Any simple, basic deeds of kindness that we genuinely offer to one another are all that God requires of us. We only need to look around to see who is in need and try to do something to alleviate that need.

This theology of welcome perhaps reaches its fullest Christian expression in the final parable Jesus tells in Matthew's gospel—the one most of us remember as the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. In that parable, Jesus reminds us that the way we treat those who are most vulnerable among us is, ultimately, representative of our response toward Jesus. In that parable, Jesus refers to the defenseless ones, with whom He identifies, as "the least." Matthew's entire gospel concludes with the principle that righteousness is broader than simply our relationship with God—that righteousness also has a great deal to do with how welcoming we are toward *one another*, especially those who are most needy among us. James, the brother of Jesus, writes in his epistle, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? . . . If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:14-17 NRSV).

As people of faith, we are called to provide compassionate welcome in which we are open to, and willing to share with, others. But we need to be careful that we do not manipulate other people just so we can feel better. There are times when pride, ego, self-doubt, anxiety, and other negative feelings get in the way and prevent us from genuinely connecting with each other except in self-interested ways. That's why we need to constantly ask for God's grace to help us compassionately welcome one another; extend authentic hospitality; and help others without regard for our self-interest.

Members of the early Christian communities were called “little ones,” and in turn, the disciples of Jesus were encouraged to identify themselves with the “little ones” in the world and to serve the needs of such “little ones.” In the original text, the Greek word used is *mikrós*, meaning “least, little, small, [or] less.” But the sense is of the community prioritizing children, those who are humble, new converts, and anyone whom society deemed negligible.

Our efforts to welcome and love the “little ones” are important because Jesus sees those efforts and receives them as worship. When we love the “little ones” we are loving Jesus. In welcoming one another into our hearts, Jesus tells us we are welcoming Him into our hearts. We are welcoming God Himself! As St. Francis reminds us, “it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”² Jesus pretty much said the same thing when He told us, “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25. NIRV).

Like all the small acts of devotion, tenderness, and forgiveness that go largely unnoticed but strengthen the relationships which are most important to us, the life of faith is also made up of many small gestures. Making a phone call to ask how a friend or acquaintance is doing; dropping off groceries for the elderly or picking up their mail for them; sending a random “thinking of and praying for you” card; reaching out to the lonely and most vulnerable among us. According to Jesus, there is no such thing as a small gesture of caring, kindness, or love. A cup of cold water is among the smallest of gifts, one that almost anyone in the civilized world is able to offer. But to someone who is desperately thirsty, a cup of cold water is precious—and can be, in some instances, the gift of life itself.

In the game of life, while we tend to prefer being the quarterback—the hero that wins the game—Jesus’ heart leans toward the water-boy or water-girl. Jesus does not specify the nature of the reward for those who help the “little ones,” but in the kingdom of God, the smallest service in the Name of Christ brings with it eternal rewards for the giver.

When poet and playwright Oscar Wilde was sent to prison in 1895, it was the ultimate humiliation. In his day, he was quite a celebrity, but all that evaporated once he was convicted of immoral acts. Whenever the prison authorities transferred him in public, he was spat upon and jeered. On one occasion, when the crowd was particularly hostile, a friend of Wilde’s appeared and made a simple gesture of friendship and respect that silenced the crowd. What was it? As Wilde passed by, handcuffed and bowed toward the ground, the man simply raised his hat to him—the smallest of welcomes. While imprisoned, Wilde wrote in the essay “De Profundis”:

“Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. It was in this spirit, and with this mode of love, that the saints knelt down to wash the feet of the poor, or stooped to kiss the leper on the cheek. I have never said one single word to him about what he did. . . . It is not a thing for which one can render formal thanks in formal words. I store it in the treasure-house of my heart. I keep it there as a secret debt that I am glad to think I can never possibly repay. It is embalmed and kept sweet by the myrrh and cassia of many tears. When wisdom has been profitless to me, philosophy barren, and the proverbs and phrases of those who have sought to give me consolation [are] as dust and ashes in my mouth, the memory of that little, lovely, silent act of love has unsealed for me all the wells of pity: made the desert blossom like a rose, and brought me out of the bitterness of lonely exile into harmony with the wounded, broken, and great heart of the world.”³

The smallest of good deeds: a little thing done in love. The cup of cold water of which Jesus speaks is symbolic of such kindness. Our Lord tells us that every single small act of caring is important—in fact, each is eternally significant. It doesn’t take much to be hospitable, welcoming, and accepting of other people. We need to get out of ourselves long enough to do it. Moreover, we just have to screw up our courage, jettison our egos, take a deep breath, pray for God’s help, and then every one of us can do such things; every one of us can make a difference. And best of all, we will find God in those smallest of good deeds.

Jesus also tells us in today's Gospel that the roles of those who welcome and those *being welcomed* are two side of the same coin. He calls us to be Christ to each other, sending us out to share the Good News, help alleviate human suffering, meet real needs, work miracles of love and healing through acts of kindness ... and offer cups of cold water. But our Lord also calls us to be gracious in *receiving* those same acts of kindness when it is our turn.

You might, in fact, be the person who needs help, the one who will be blessed by someone else's small acts of love and kindness. And yet, we can be resistant to accepting assistance from other members of the Christian community. We are embarrassed. We don't want fellow parishioners to think less of us. But when we welcome one another, we both discover the reward that comes from the immense hospitality found in God's welcome of each and every one of us. Remember: Whoever gives *you* even a cup of cold water will most definitely not lose their reward. So, accept it with joy.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the countless ways You bless us every day. This morning, we ask that you would open our eyes to see the people around us who need a simple act of kindness, an encouraging word, or a helping hand. Deliver us from self-centeredness or feeling too busy. Rather, fill our hearts with Your love so that we might easily and comfortably share that love. Give us the grace and courage to perform small acts of service without expecting recognition or reward. Remind us that no act of caring is insignificant, and that in serving others, we are serving You. Guide our actions and make each of us an instrument of Your peace. We ask this in Jesus' Name.⁴ *Amen.*

¹ Adapt. Marcea Paul, "Even One Cup," 4 June 2020, [EpiscopalChurch.org](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/even-one-cup-pentecost-4-a-june-28-2020/) <<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/even-one-cup-pentecost-4-a-june-28-2020/>> 23 June 2026.

² "A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis," *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York, Church Publishing, 1979), p. 833.

³ Oscar Wilde, "De Profundis," p.2 1897, [OscarWilde online](https://www.wilde-online.info/de-profundis-page2.html) <<https://www.wilde-online.info/de-profundis-page2.html>> 23 June 2026.

⁴ Sources: Yvonne Morgan, "How Small Acts of Kindness Reflect God's Love," <<https://yvonne-morgan.com/2025/10/15/how-small-acts-of-kindness-reflect-gods-love/>>; Jennifer Woodruff, "Daily Bible Verse and Inspirational Quotes," <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2877088329241431/posts/4202477566702494/>>; Chinonyerem Ukachukwu, "Leadership and Management," <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/112771712229961/posts/2991620377678399/>> 23 June 2026.