

Bearsden

Communion, 28/6/26 (Pentecost 5/Trinity 4)

Readings: Jeremiah 28.5-9; Romans 6.12-23; Matthew 10.40-42

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus' words in our gospel today are deceptively simple: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

At first glance, this sounds like a gentle teaching about hospitality. But in Matthew's Gospel, these words come at the end of a long and demanding discourse about mission, which we've been studying ourselves for the past few weeks – about being sent out vulnerable, without money, without protection, without guarantees. Jesus sends his disciples into a world that may reject them, misunderstand them, or even persecute them.

And it's into that harsh reality he speaks this promise: Every act of welcome offered to you is an act of welcome offered to me. This is not just about being polite. It is about recognising Christ in the people he sends: not just prophets, the righteous, the impressive or the eloquent. Even "one of these little ones"—the least, the unnoticed, the vulnerable—bears the presence of Christ.

This is a radical re-ordering of value. In a world that honours status, Jesus honours the overlooked. In a world that rewards power, Jesus rewards compassion. In a world that measures worth by achievement, Jesus measures it by welcome.

Jesus then speaks of a cup of cold water. Not a feast. Not a grand gesture. Not a heroic sacrifice. Just a cup of cold water. In the Middle Eastern heat, perhaps even around the UK these past few days, that is the simplest act of kindness imaginable. And yet Jesus says it carries eternal significance. In the Kingdom of God, small acts done in love are never small.

A cup of water becomes a sacrament of grace. A moment of kindness becomes participation in God's mission. A gesture of welcome becomes a doorway into eternal life. This is good news for every Christian who feels they have little to offer. Jesus says: Offer what you can. It is enough.

There is another side to this teaching. It is not only about giving welcome; it is also about receiving it. The disciples are sent out with nothing so that they must rely on the hospitality of others. They must learn to be vulnerable. They must learn to accept help. They must learn to see Christ in those who welcome them.

So Jesus speaks of welcome—and he says that such welcome is not merely kindness; it is participation in God's own mission. To welcome the messenger is to welcome the One who sent them. To offer even a cup of cold water is to align oneself with the Kingdom.

This is not sentimental hospitality. It is costly hospitality. It means receiving the truth-tellers, even when their message is uncomfortable. It means welcoming the vulnerable, even when it disrupts our comfort. It means recognising Christ in the least impressive, the least powerful, the least noticed. Jesus is saying: The way you treat the people I send reveals whether you truly belong to me.

In our Old Testament reading we hear about truth that costs something. Jeremiah stands in the temple facing Hananiah, a prophet who promises an easy future: the exile will end quickly, the yoke will be broken, everything will be fine. It is the kind of message people want to hear. Jeremiah, by contrast, has spent years proclaiming a harder truth: that the people must face the consequences of their unfaithfulness and that the exile will not be short.

Jeremiah's response is striking. He doesn't shout Hananiah down. He simply says: "the true prophet is known when the word comes to pass." In other words: truth is not measured by how comforting it sounds, but by whether it is faithful to God and borne out in life. Jeremiah reminds us that God's word is often challenging before it is comforting. It calls us to repentance before restoration, obedience before reassurance. The easy message is not always the true one.

Paul picks up the same theme of uncomfortable truth. He speaks of freedom—but not the kind the world imagines. For Paul, everyone serves something. The only question is whom. Paul is blunt: Christian freedom is not freedom from responsibility; it is freedom for holiness. It is not freedom to do whatever we like; it is freedom to become what God intended us to be.

So across all of these readings this morning, a pattern emerges:

- Jeremiah warns us against the temptation of comforting lies.
- Paul calls us to the costly freedom of obedience.
- Jesus invites us to welcome those who bear God's truth, even when they challenge us.

The Christian life is not built on easy assurances but on faithful endurance. It is not built on spiritual self-indulgence but on service. It is not built on grand gestures but on small, consistent acts of love.

In our own time, we still face the temptation to think of freedom as doing whatever we please. But Paul reminds us that true freedom is found in serving God. We still face the temptation to overlook the small, the ordinary, the inconvenient. But Jesus reminds us that the Kingdom is revealed in the smallest acts of welcome.

At its core, our gospel reveals something profound about God: God chooses to be encountered in human relationships. Not in abstract ideas. Not in distant holiness. But in the simple, messy, ordinary exchanges of daily life.

To welcome another is to welcome Christ. To serve another is to serve Christ. To love another is to love Christ. This is the Gospel summed up simply.

So today, Jesus invites us into a life of holy hospitality that sees Christ in the stranger, Christ in the disciple, Christ in the vulnerable, Christ in the one who offers even a cup of cold water.

May we be people who welcome Christ wherever he appears, and may we have the grace to recognise him in the smallest acts of love.

The good news is that God does not ask us to do any of this alone. Christ himself has walked the path of costly obedience. Christ himself has welcomed us when we were strangers. Christ himself gives us the Spirit who leads us into truth.

And so we can dare to follow him— in truth, in freedom, and in hospitality that reveals the very heart of God.