

Matthew 10:40-42
July 2, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

It's been a while since the Pokeman Go app was such a craze. For those of you who don't know, this is a game played via one's cell phone. There are random spots around town that an individual walks to and then on their phone finds a virtual character or object and advances to the next stage or at least that is how I understand it. I have never actually played myself. However, many did and continue to do so. For a while you see vast quantities of people walking all over town holding their phones and heading to their next destination. Bethany was one of those locations as were many churches, schools, museums, parks, and other public places.

The Synod Center for Ministry (aka Office of the Bishop or Synod Offices) in Iowa City was also a location and they did something interesting. They sat out a cooler full of bottled water for those players that showed up. A way of welcoming and receiving them with a simple gesture of hospitality. Some of you may recall that shortly after seeing this we, too, placed a small cooler on the bench outside the doors to the parking lot with a sign welcoming those players and also a quick note that said, "God loves you." I don't recall exactly how many

bottles of water were taken but I do recall opening up the lid one morning and finding a note. A short, simple note saying, “Thank you for the water!” That’s it. One 12 cent bottle of water. One small note of thanks. How simple!

Our gospel text from Matthew today brings Jesus’ “missionary discourse” he has been directing to his disciples to a close. It began at the beginning of Chapter 10 as he summoned them and then sent them out to proclaim the good news, to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. He assures them that it won’t be easy in fact at one point he says to them, “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.” (10:16) He also tells them they may be persecuted, hated, and that even their families may be divided because of the mission he has entrusted them with. It won’t be easy! It is clear they won’t always be received warmly but today, as he concludes his teaching, he does shed a glimmer of hope on the mission at hand. There will be those who receive and welcome them showing to them the same hospitality that would be afforded Jesus because they are the very emissaries not only of Christ but also of the one who sent Him into the world, God.

As we fast forward 2000 years to our current context we are joined to that very same mission. We are called by the very same God who sent Jesus into the world and we, too, go forth as ambassadors of Christ. It’s an awesome

responsibility and a huge task. It is what we pray in our Offertory prayer we will lift up shortly, “Nourish us with these gifts, that we might be for the world signs of your gracious presence ...,”ⁱ or in our post-communion prayer, “Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit, that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world.”ⁱⁱ We are called to go into a world that at times will seem very uninviting and inhospitable. The church is a missional church called to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near. This text also lifts up the fact that being a disciple of Christ also involves welcoming the other. The stranger.

The world we live in does have a plethora of problems that seem insurmountable. In fact, at times, the very church we love seems to have too many issues and obstacles and perhaps we wonder if we are really making a difference. It’s easy to become overwhelmed thinking we have to do something on a grand scale to move forward. Or to become so easily despaired thinking we aren’t making a difference. Yet, the gospel message assures us that we are making a difference even if it is one cup of water at a time. People of God, you matter and everything you do in your daily life in the name of Jesus Christ matters. Even the smallest of things, such as a cup of cold water, make a difference. Please don’t give up or sit idly on the sidelines thinking someone else will do it. God calls each of us and needs each of us. We may not be able to solve

all the problems but we can make a difference one person at a time. We do make a difference one can of food at a time. We do make a difference one meal at a time on a Sunday night. We do make a difference one handshake and smile at a time when folks enter the doors of God's house. We do make a difference in the life of one child we teach at Sunday school, VBS, or confirmation. We do make a difference with each knot tied on a quilt sent and received by someone in need. We do make a difference each prayer we lift up. We do make a difference with simply one conversation we have with someone we may not know and listen to their story. We do make a difference with each shirt we hand out, or each word of encouragement we offer to a brother or sister in need of building up. We do make a difference with each dollar we give. We do make a difference simply by being present. We do make a difference even with one 12 cent bottle of water or one simple gesture of "thank you."

People of God! Thank you for all you do here at Bethany and for all you do in your daily lives that reflects the light of Christ to the world. Please know that your labor is not in vain and that your reward, freely given by God, will be great because God's love for each of you is great!

ⁱ Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Augsburg Fortress, 2006) p. 106

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 114