

Matthew 10:40-42

When one talks about being called to a ministry, this can sound rather involved, maybe even intimidating to some of us...but Jesus reminds us in the passage in the Gospel of Matthew that ministry can be as simple as the most basic gesture of hospitality- that of offering someone who is thirsty a cup of cool water.

Ironically, one of my most powerful life changing experiences was with a ministry that was founded by a college student and friend in Spokane, Washington called "Cup of Cool Water." The founder, Mark Terrell was given a vision of this ministry during a prayer with a simple but important goal – to address the needs of the many homeless children and youth in that city by providing relationships and their basic needs in the name of Christ. As the ministry was just starting to develop volunteers like myself were gathered to go and walk the streets with the goal of getting to know the homeless youth and children that lived there. We heard the most incredible stories from these young people, some of them as young as 11 years old who had made the streets their home. Like the 12-year-old girl that came home from school one day to find her house locked and empty. Hours turned to into days as she began to realize that her mother and her mother's boyfriend had left and abandoned her forever. She never saw them again. And the people that took care of her when that happened were the homeless youth living on the street. There was the 14-year-old girl who was being abused so badly by her stepfather that she ran away from home in an attempt to save her own life when her mother refused to intervene. The streets had become safer than her own home. There was the 16-year-old boy that had been kicked out of his house with nowhere to go because he was getting into too much trouble. He said he would rather beg for food than beg to be loved by his parents. There was the 15-year-old girl that had been sent to multiple foster care families only to experience heartbreak and abuse with several of these strangers. The streets were easier and more predictable than the foster care system she told me. These young people were living a life that many of us could never imagine – and many of them were going to remain on the streets well into adulthood, having neither the will nor the experience to live any other way.

At times I felt desperate in this ministry- how could we be of any help to these youths? Their needs were so great, their stories so tragic, their lives so broken. One day we were walking the streets and came upon a 14-year-old homeless girl – her clothes dirty and torn as

she sat huddled on the corner by herself, head in her hands, knees bent. One of the volunteers started talking to her about Jesus' love – the girl shook her head and said, "Please leave me alone." I was upset by the lack of compassion the volunteer had shown but most of us could see the problem- what this girl needed was not information or a theological discussion about the love of God – what she needed was a cup of cool water.... a basic gesture of loving kindness from one person to another. It was not enough, in fact it was completely upside down if not immoral to talk about the love of Jesus in this situation instead of simply showing the love of Jesus in our actions. Someone else stopped the volunteer from talking and simply asked the girl what she needed – "socks" was the girl's response. Socks were found and brought to her along with a hot meal before nightfall.

That ministry changed my life and it changed the way I thought of ministry as well. Later when I learned of St. Francis' call to "Preach the Gospel always, use words if necessary" it made perfect sense.

As followers of Christ we have all been called to ministry- you and I. That ministry may take many different forms. But sharing in ministry is part of our purpose in life and our reason for being (as Christians). Whatever gifts we have been given, whatever blessings we have to share are ours for the sake of others. In any given time and place we are being invited to minister in the Name of Christ to those in our path. When someone tells me they don't think of themselves as a minister I ask, "Can you offer someone a cup of cool water?"

Now I know some of us will object and feel as though offering a cup of cool water isn't enough. We have to do bigger and greater things, right? But think about a time when you were in need – maybe when you had been ill, were in grief, or suffering in some way – even the smallest gesture of compassion probably made a world of difference to you - just a gracious reminder that you are not alone and you are loved.

When I was sick in college suffering in my dorm room, unable to do or get anything for myself, I'll never forget the simple grace of a friend coming to my room with a bowl of hot soup she had made. I won't ever forget the casseroles that appeared at my door when I was recovering from a difficult labor and subsequent surgery. I won't ever forget the donation someone made to the church to help me cover the costs of a medical procedure I couldn't afford otherwise. I won't ever forget the phone call to remind me that I was being

upheld in prayer when I was in the midst of terrible grief. I won't ever forget the blanket that was knit for me when I was all alone in a new city. These were and have been cups of cool water for me. What about your cups of cool water? What have been the signs of God's love and grace in your life – those cups of cool water that made all the difference to you when you needed it? If these otherwise small gestures meant a lot to you in your time of need, how much more will those in our wider community who are often in much greater need than any of us could ever experience mean to them?

The invitation I give you this coming week as we celebrate our nation's independence and find fellowship with our friends and family is to find a way to share a cup of cool water to someone in need. From the stranger on the street, to the hungry child across the globe, to your best friend in the world: be the hands of Christ to others, embrace your own God-given ministry, and share a cup of cool water.

Amen.