

“Does Anybody Care?” 7-2-17

Psalm 13

Matthew 10:40-42

I was in Linz, Austria. A group of thirty of us had just finished dinner around 11:45 PM. I went into the Rest Room as we were finishing and paying the bill. When I came out there was no sign of the group that I was with. I looked in the parking lot and, behold, no bus.

Back into the restaurant I went, not knowing what to do. I found someone who spoke English on the restaurant staff and was pointed to the Autobahn and told the restaurant was to close in five minutes. Off I went and found the Autobahn, joining two other hitchhikers. After a while and no offers I went back to the restaurant which by now was closed. I felt lost and hurt, deserted by my group late at night in a foreign country. Does anybody care? Then I thought, you know, someone will notice I am not there, inform the driver, and come back to retrieve me. That never happened.

Noticing some of the restaurant staff still present I found someone to speak with and asked what some other options might be. I told him that I needed to get to Salzburg which was a ways away. He looked around and saw an Austrian couple late finishing dinner. Unknown to me he went up to them and asked if they might give me a ride. They said yes and asked where I was going. I told them. They were not going to Salzburg but would take me as far as they could in that direction. I was very agreeable at that point.

Off we went. Stopping at a gas station I saw them talking to a truck driver. Next thing I knew I was in a truck on the way to Salzburg. We couldn't communicate so when we arrived in Salzburg he dropped me off at the police station. That was fun, being interrogated as I tried to communicate who I was and why I was there amidst the presumptions of what they thought of me and my presence that night. It was 1:30 AM or even later.

Ultimately I ended up being driven in a police car by a policeman attempting to locate where I was staying. I don't remember how, but I was able to communicate enough as to our location and we finally arrived. He doesn't just let me out of the car. He gets out as well and escorts me to the door, which was locked. We knock on the door. Finally someone awakens to open it, all being sound asleep. The policeman turns on his flashlight, lighting partially the dark, and starts pointing it at the sleeping group, one by one. Startled they were. Finally the suspicious policeman, satisfied, turns around and begins to leave. I thank him profusely.

Angry, I asked why I was left behind. Did anybody care or notice that I was not on that bus? All asleep when I arrived, no one having made an effort to track me, I was told; “We figured that you were resourceful and would find a way back here”. Now I really felt abandoned and uncared for.

There is a deeper longing in the human heart, directed vertically as well as horizontally, voiced by David's questions in the Psalm. “How long, O Lord. Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide

your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy exalt over me?"

I wonder if this is what David Dao felt as he was dragged off a United Airlines flight by aviation police in Chicago. He refused to deplane and wait for a later flight. The police then hauled him off and dragged him down the aisle. They broke his nose, leaving him bloody and concussed.

As Stephanie Paulsell writes in an article, "Faith Matters When the Market is God"; "The police had sworn to serve and protect, but the person they protected was the corporation that owned the plane, not the human being who had paid that corporation to fly him home" (Christian Century, June 7th, 2017).

This is a world that daily demonstrates neglect of others. This is observed in the proposed national health care policy debate, attitudes toward refugees and the poor and underprivileged. As wealth finds its way into the hands of the few, premised on the trickle-down theory of economics, such a "deified market has created a globalization of indifference" (Pope Francis).

The group Chicago sang a song during the Vietnam War era, 'Does Anybody Know What Time it Is?' The words are relevant to our texts this morning; "Does anybody really know what time it is, does anybody really care, if so I can't imagine ...People runnin' everywhere, don't know where to go, don't know where I am, can't see past the next step, don't have time to think past the last mile, have no time to look around, just run around, run around and think why, does anybody really know what time it is, does anybody really care..."

In Jesus' world, really no different than ours in its inequities, he challenges the values then as well as now. Does anybody care? Jesus says "Yes. God cares".

Throughout our reflections on Matthew 10, Jesus has told us to preach and teach with boldness, don't waste time with people who want nothing to do with you, travel light, be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, don't worry about what you will say, trust God to give you the right words, when things get bad, remember, people can kill the body, but not the soul, and those who find their life will lose it. Jesus then directs us to the power of hospitality and the offering of a cup of cold water.

Jesus opens our hearts and minds to the inherent hospitality forming the core of the gospel. Hospitality embraces those around us who are dying of thirst, lonely in a crowd, souls and bodies asking if anybody cares. To be attentive and open to another is to be open and welcoming to God. To ignore another is to ignore God. James writes, "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food...and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?" (James 2:14-17). A similar admonition is found in Proverbs 3:27, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it". God cares and you and I are the vehicles of that hospitable caring.

When I was a student at Louisville Seminary I participated in the Clinical Pastoral Education program. Being trained as a chaplain, when entering a room, we were taught, you no longer are just yourself. You are representing Christ.

As a church, we are no longer just a collection of individuals making up an organization called church. We represent the hospitality of Christ to one another and the world around us. It was hard to hear when an ex member of a church I served in Tacoma said to me, "I left the church because no one noticed or cared for me". We are the body of Christ. We don't just exist for ourselves and our personal comfort. Our task as Jesus' followers is to actively inspire and serve Jesus in the faces of others in need. "Christ is made visible in the act of welcoming, in giving and receiving hospitality" (Christian Century, Liddy Barlow, p. 21).

Sometimes it is in the simple symbolic act of offering a "cup of cold water" that Christ touches people. In the movie Ben-Hur, there is a powerful scene where Jesus offers a cup of cold water to a thirsty and oppressed Judah Ben-Hur. It becomes transformative as the course of his life unfolds.

The Rev. Robin Hoover began the Humane Borders project to provide cold water to migrants dying in the desert of southwestern Arizona. He believes that he is "serving the needs of these Christians, who kneel and pray to God before crossing the border". He researches to find out where they are dying in the greatest numbers. His organization provides free, fresh water in well-marked cisterns.

Some accuse him of encouraging the migrants. Hoover replies, "No one comes here just to drink water". His attitude is that he personally has no control over immigration policy. He simply does what he can do for these thirsty travelers (Homiletics, July-August, 2017, p. 16).

The cup of cold water can be symbolic. Anne Lamont writes in an article, "Every Sandwich", of the state of her soul before she drank the water of Christ's life; "I was so isolated and disgusting on the inside that I had to run around with my glass empty, hoping other people would have extra water sloshing out of theirs that they would share with me...Lots of people gave me water. But what quenched my thirst was the spirit that animated their kindness..." (Homiletics, p. 16).

I was certainly grateful for those who gave me a cup of cold water that night in Austria.

Does anybody care? They won't know if we refuse entry of the Spirit of Christ within so that God can care through us. But if we do, unleashed is the hope, renewal, and possibilities that Christ's life can bring to people. This inhospitable world is thirsty.