



Sunday, June 28, 2026
Matthew 10:40-42 (Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

If anyone else was wondering whether God thought I needed a sabbatical, the past several weeks have felt like a pretty convincing argument. Some pastors prepare for their sabbatical by making reading lists or planning travel itineraries...and while I've done a fair amount of the latter, apparently, my other way of preparing is by racking up injuries. Ever heard of Murphy's Law? You know, the popular saying that says, "*anything that can go wrong will go wrong*." Well, somehow over the past few months if there was a way to pull a muscle, tweak a joint, bruise something I didn't even know could bruise, or discover that my body doesn't recover quite as quickly as it used to...I seemed determined to find it. Lately, many of you have suggested perhaps it's time to just wrap me in bubble wrap until I'm ready to go.

The strange thing is, every time I limped into church or showed up with a new boot or brace, someone would ask, "*How are you doing?*" Someone would offer encouragement. Someone would promise prayers. Someone would gently lecture me to take better care of myself – which, honestly was a reminder I needed. And it helped me to realize something. That as one of your pastors, I spend a lot of my time trying to care for other people. But these past weeks have reminded me that sometimes the harder part of being a disciple is allowing others to care for us. Most of us are much better at offering help than receiving it. We like to be the ones bringing the casserole. We're less comfortable being the ones accepting it. We like to be the ones praying. We're not always comfortable admitting that we need the prayers. We like to be the ones giving hospitality, because receiving it can feel awkward. But today's Gospel reminds us that hospitality is never a one-way street. Jesus says, "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me*." Notice that Jesus doesn't just *tell us to be welcoming people*, he also assumes there will be times when *we* are the ones who need to be welcomed. The disciples are sent into the world dependent on the kindness of others. They arrive not as self-sufficient experts but as guests. They receive meals. They receive shelter. They receive kindness. They receive cups of cold water. Because that's part of following Jesus. And perhaps that's true for all of us. Because before we ever learn to extend God's welcome, we first learn what it feels like to receive it.

And some gifts seem almost too small to matter. A smile. A handshake. A card in the mail. A listening ear. A door held open. A glass of cold water. None of these things are ground breaking. None of them are especially impressive. And yet, in today's gospel Jesus says that something as simple as offering "*even a cup of cold water*" to one of his disciples is noticed by God. That's amazing! Because Jesus isn't measuring greatness the way the world measures greatness. He isn't asking about wealth or status or influence. He isn't asking how many followers someone has or how many accomplishments they can list. Instead, Jesus points to ordinary hospitality. Simple kindness. Faith expressed in welcome. "You received someone." "You welcomed someone." "You gave someone a drink." And in doing so, Jesus says, you welcomed me.

I think this is one of the most beautiful mysteries of our faith...that Jesus continues to come to us in and through other people. Whenever we welcome another person in love, Jesus is present. Whenever someone welcomes us with grace, Jesus is present. Hospitality is never just proper social etiquette. It's holy work. Throughout Scripture, God is always the one extending hospitality first. From Genesis to Revelation, our God is the one who makes room. God makes room for creation. God makes room for those who wander like Abraham and Sarah. God makes room for Israel in the wilderness. God prepares a table in the presence of enemies. God welcomes prodigals home. And in Jesus Christ, God opens the doors of mercy for the whole world. And the gospel of Jesus Christ is God's great act of hospitality. On the cross, Jesus stretched out his arms to embrace a broken world, and in the resurrection he opened the door to a new creation where no one is beyond God's welcome. Before we ever invited God into our lives, God welcomed us into God's own life. Before we wanted forgiveness, God offered grace. Before we found our way home, Jesus came searching for us. Everything begins there. We don't practice hospitality because we're trying to earn God's favor. We practice hospitality because



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we've already received it. Every Sunday we gather around this table. None of us *earns* a place here. None of us *deserves a seat more than another*. Jesus simply says, "*Come*." Hungry? Come. Weary? Come. Joyful? Come. Full of questions? Come. Certain? Uncertain? Come.

This table has always been larger than our expectations because God's grace has always been larger than our needs or wants. And then, nourished by that welcome, we're sent to become welcoming people. That's the rhythm of a faithful life. Receive. Then give. Be welcomed. Then welcome. Be forgiven. Then forgive. Be loved. Then love. Jesus reminds us today that even small acts matter. Sometimes we imagine that faithfulness requires dramatic moments. But more often than not, the kingdom of God grows quietly. It grows through meals delivered after surgery. Through prayers whispered in hospital rooms. Through volunteers who show up to help. Through Sunday School teachers, and choir members, people who wash dishes. Through people who quietly fold bulletins, visit shut-ins, make coffee, tend the gardens, knit prayer shawls, mentor children, greet visitors, and offer rides. Most of these things never make the evening news. But they're exactly the kinds of things Jesus notices. They're cups of cold water. They're signs of God's kingdom already among us. And I've seen so many of these cups of cold water here at Ascension. I've watched you care for one another and for me through illness and grief. I've watched you celebrate baptisms and confirmations and new beginnings. I've watched you welcome visitors who quickly became friends. And I've watched you love neighbors in practical ways that often go unseen. You've reminded me again and again that hospitality isn't a committee. It's a way of life. It's simply what happens when people know that they've first been welcomed by Jesus. Today is a significant day for me personally. Because after services, I'll begin my three-month sabbatical and I'm deeply grateful for this incredible gift. In many ways, this sabbatical is another opportunity for *me* to practice receiving – to receive rest as God's gift, to receive renewal instead of trying to create it, and to trust that God continues to care for this congregation, just as God always has. That may be one of the quiet lessons these past few weeks have been teaching me. Just as I've had to receive prayers, encouragement, and care while nursing one injury after another, now I also have the opportunity to receive this season of sabbath rest. Not because pastors are indispensable until they finally wear out, but because even pastors are disciples first. And disciples sometimes need to rest. They sometimes need to be cared for. They sometimes need to trust that God is fully capable of tending to the flock while they step away for a time. A sabbatical is not an ending but a season of renewal – a chance to rest, learn, pray, listen, and return refreshed for the ministry God continues to entrust to us together.

And while I'll be away, the ministry of Ascension will continue. Because as I said in my sermon last week, this has never been one person's church. It's God's church. The Holy Spirit will continue to gather, enlighten, and bless. Children will continue learning. Worship will continue. Music will continue. Service will continue. New friendships will begin. Guests will become family. And people will continue discovering God's grace.

And one of the most beautiful signs of that continuing ministry will be the upcoming trip to Tanzania. It is a reminder that the Church is wonderfully larger than any one congregation or country. Across languages and cultures, we share one baptism, one Lord, one faith, and one table. The friendships that will grow through this companion relationship are themselves acts of holy hospitality – receiving one another as gifts from God, learning from one another, sharing stories, worshiping together, and witnessing Christ's love together. May every conversation, every meal shared, every embrace, and every act of welcome reflect the love of Christ that unites us across continents. And while we are apart for these next few months, I leave with a sense of peace.

Not because everything will always be easy. Life rarely is. Many of us carry burdens today that no one else can fully see. Some are grieving. Some are anxious. Some wonder what the future holds. Some simply feel tired.



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But *our hope* has never depended on circumstances. Our hope rests in the one who continues to welcome us every single day. The Savior who says, "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,*" is also the Savior who continues to welcome each of us. Nothing – not distance, not uncertainty, and not even change can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. That promise remains true whether we are sitting beside one another in these pews or separated by many miles. The Church has always been held together by more than proximity. We are held together by Jesus.

So while we won't see one another every Sunday for a while, we remain members of one body. We remain connected through prayer. Through the Holy Spirit. Through the promises of baptism. Through the love of Jesus that holds us all. So until we're together again, continue being who you already are. Keep welcoming. Keep serving. Keep singing. Keep praying. Keep laughing. Keep extending those cups of cold water in Jesus' name. And as you do, remember the words of the Apostle Paul...

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

There will always be voices urging us to dwell on fear, division, and discouragement. Instead, keep your eyes open for the places where Jesus is already at work. Notice the kindness that often goes unseen. Celebrate the goodness that quietly takes place. Give thanks for the grace that keeps finding us. Look for those everyday cups of cold water that reveal the kingdom of God in your midst. And when you see them, rejoice. Because every act of welcome, every word of encouragement, every prayer offered, every meal shared, every child embraced, every stranger received, every burden carried together is another reminder that Jesus is still alive and at work among his people. May the God who has welcomed us continue to fill this place with grace. May Jesus continue to be present in every act of kindness you offer. May the Holy Spirit continue to make Ascension a place where every person who walks through these doors discovers that they are loved, forgiven, valued, and welcomed home. Thank you for allowing me this season of Sabbath. Thank you for your love, your prayers, your partnership in the gospel, and the privilege of serving alongside you. Know that I will carry you in my prayers throughout these coming months, just as I trust you will carry me in yours. And until God brings us together again, may "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Thanks be to God! Amen.