

June 28, 2020
Hope Lutheran Church
Pastor Mary Erickson
Matthew 10:40-42

Oases of Grace

Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the 1930's Roy Rogers and two other singers formed a musical trio. They came to be known as The Sons of the Pioneers. The Sons became famous for their cowboy songs. Although the membership has changed many times, the Sons of the Pioneers still exist today. Altogether, 42 men have been a part of the group.

One of their perennial favorite songs is "Cool Water." In the song a cowboy and his faithful horse drive through barren regions where little water can be found.

All day I face the barren waste without
the taste of water, cool water.
Old Dan and I with throats burned dry and
souls that cry for water, cool, clear
water.

Today's reading from Matthew is a continuation of the passage which began two Sundays ago. Jesus called together his 12 disciples and sent them out on a mission. But before they go, he gives them some parting instructions. We heard those instructions last Sunday. And they have an ominous tone! He warns them about rejection and persecution. Their mission in Christ's name might lead to division within their family, maybe even to their death!

But he ends his instructions in today's reading. The foreboding message from last week concludes with a measure of grace.

"Yes, you will meet resistance. People will indeed take offense at you. And they may even take some swipes at you.

"But, disciples, there will be other people, too. And these people will welcome you. When you prophecy to them, they will be receptive. They'll heed the message you proclaim.

"And when you go about doing deeds justice and mercy, people will be there. And they'll welcome you, too. They'll roll up their sleeves and work right beside you, dear disciples.

"And when you're beat, when you're used up and near the end of your limit, when you need a cool drink of water, someone, dear disciple, someone will come and offer you a drink of water. Someone will come to slake your thirst."

The nights are cool and I'm a fool, each
star's a pool of water, cool water.
But with the dawn I'll wake and yawn and
carry on to water, cool, clear water.

There are people who come our way and sustain us. I hope you have them in your life. When the going gets rough, they're the ones you call. When you see them, their very presence lifts your spirits. Your day gets brighter and your hopes are quickened. These good souls are supportive and welcoming. They're swift to offer a hand. You know they care genuinely about you.

Their presence is like an oasis. They're a refuge; they're a welcomed haven of repose along the hard journey. When you're in their midst, you feel refreshment. Your load becomes lighter, your vitality is renewed, and you gain the strength to continue on.

Jesus promised that these people will meet us along the way. It doesn't really take a lot to bring encouragement. Something even as small as a drink of cool water can do the trick. That oasis might present itself as a hug or a shoulder to cry on. It might be a nutritious meal cooked for you when you can't cook for yourself. That oasis could be a listening ear, someone who really stops to hear you. When you talk to them, they give you their full attention. You know you are heard, you know that you matter to them.

The shadows sway and seem to say
tonight we pray for water, cool water.
And way up there He'll hear our prayer
and show us where there's water, cool,
clear water.

If we look closely, there are hundreds of oases, countless people who lavish us with grace upon grace.

They might come from an unexpected source. Jesus told a parable about a man down on his luck. If anyone needed an oasis of grace, it was this guy! He was robbed and left in the ditch along the lonely Jericho highway. Cars whizzed by. The SUV with the "Jesus Loves You" bumper sticker slowed down to get a better look. But as soon as they saw him, they stepped on the gas!

A church van came by next. They, too, slowed, but they were already on a mission. And their mission didn't include this poor guy in the ditch!

Finally, a foreign guy, a Samaritan came upon the scene. He pulled over, got out of his rusty pickup truck and ran over to help the man. He gave him a bottle of water and

bandaged his wounds as best he could with the first aid kit he kept in the glove compartment. Then he helped the besieged man into the cab of his pickup and drove him to the nearest Urgent Care center.

Sometimes that helpful hand, that encouraging word, that strong shoulder can come from an unexpected direction. Jesus assures us, there will be welcoming souls, there will be oases of grace.

Dan's feet are sore he's yearning for just
one thing more than water, cool water.
Like me, I guess, he'd like to rest where
there's no quest for water, cool, clear
water.

Friends, as we course this journey, Christ can utilize us as agents of grace! How can you be an oasis to others? Who do you know who needs welcoming and refuge? There are many desert places.

- What weary travelers come your way?
- Who is invisible but yearns to be seen?
- Who is bullied and could use a friend?
- Who is lonely and would delight in a conversation?
- Who's a little bit lost and could use some direction?

Jesus promises that whoever is an oasis of welcome and grace will be rewarded.

And what exactly is that reward? We shall see God! "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

And we shall say, "Lord, when did we see you? When was it that we saw you thirsty and gave you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you?"

And he will say, "Just as you did it to the least of these, my little sisters and brothers, you did it unto me."