

Later this week, people all over our country will celebrate Independence Day with parades, fireworks, parties, political rallies, and even reenactments of events leading up to the July 4, 1776, Declaration of Independence against Parliament and King George III. Independence. It's the American way, but it's in stark contrast to what we heard in our Old Testament lesson this morning. Abraham is told to sacrifice Isaac to Almighty God, and rather than being "independent," Abraham becomes fully reliant – fully dependent – on God, and God stops him from sacrificing his son at the last minute.

Our being dependent on God is not something our society and our culture appreciates. We live in a world that rewards self-starters – people who drag themselves up by the bootstraps – and looks down on people perceived to be lower class. Last week we heard some of the difficulties which arise in our journey of being faithful followers of Jesus, and of making Him known in the world. Today we'll wrap up what Jesus told the twelve apostles in Matthew 10:40-42. **Read Matthew 10:40-42.**

Prior to what we just read, Jesus has told His disciples not to fear people, and that following Him is going to set them apart at times even from members of their own families. Notice what He says today to them, and to us. "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes Me, and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me," (Matt. 10:40). See friends, when we commit to following Jesus – we do that at our baptism and confirmation – we agree with God that we aren't just going to be sayers of the word, but also doers of the word.

Oftentimes that's where the Church, in general, falls short. We want to do all the talking, but we don't like to do the walking. Each one of us – if we say we believe in Jesus Christ, and what He's done for us on the cross – are called to be ambassadors for Him. We're Christ's representatives in the world today.

Now, you think about some representatives you know. I mean people in the Ohio State Government, and in Congress. They don't always represent us, do they? They don't always put our interests above their own. Oftentimes our political leaders are downright crooks. When we represent Christ to the world, He can't afford for us to act like the politicians. He demands that we talk the talk AND walk the walk!

Since we're representing Him to the world, He tells us that if people welcome us, they welcome Him – and by extension, they welcome the Father. Look what Matthew records Jesus saying next. He says, "Whoever welcomes a

prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward," (verse 41). Sounds like something the Riddler would say to Batman, doesn't it? What's Jesus saying here? He's saying if we welcome a prophet, we receive the reward of a prophet – not that we are a prophet, but we reap the reward. If we welcome the righteous, we receive the reward of the righteous – not that we are righteous, but we reap the reward. Isn't that amazing?

When we show radical hospitality, and we welcome people in – we're doing exactly what God wants us to do. He wants us to show hospitality to neighbors. And the neighbors may not look like us. They may not have the same political or theological stances that we have – but we welcome them, and love them anyhow. And New Hope, as a local church, you do an amazing job at that. You are a safe space – a safe harbor for all people to come into, and to be loved on.

You did that this past week, with Vacation Bible School. Each night the kids who came heard various Bible lessons, and learned lots of things. But do you what the big take away was? To shine Jesus' light. In the valleys, in the dark, in moments of joy, in times of sadness – shine Jesus' light. The world's a dark place, and in desperate need of His light. Jesus says, "If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is My disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward," (verse 42). And you quenched the parched throats of thirsty little ones this week! Kendra and I are very proud of you – and we're looking forward to all the great adventures this coming conference year will have for us all together here, as we follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ contained in the Gospels – of loving God and others.

Prayer: Ruler of the Universe, You call us to radical loyalty beyond all earthly claim. Grant us strength to offer ourselves to You, as people who have been raised from death to life through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.