

**Matthew 10: 40-42**  
**July 2, 2017**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

On the door to my office is a cartoon. It depicts two men who are obviously crawling through the desert with no water in sight. In the picture one man is holding a cup of water while the other is just raising himself to look ahead. What he sees is a woman pushing a water wagon. The man with the water says, "I wasn't sure if I should wake you."

This cartoon appeals to me on several levels.

First the man with the water was awake for the water wagon but somehow didn't want to bother the man dying of thirst in the desert because he "didn't want to wake him"! Now, as a rule, offering advice when it is not being asked for is not recommended and can be annoying to the object of our wisdom. But aren't there circumstances when we may wake somebody up to receive something that we know they need? In the case of the cartoon *both* men are dying of thirst in the desert. Someone offers a cup of cold water. The "awake" man takes it and so is refreshed and able to continue on the journey. He knows that if his companion continues to sleep he will miss the life sustaining drink. But he decides not to intrude upon the man's slumber.

How is this different from offering unwanted, paternalistic advice?

First: Both people are in the same predicament. Both are crawling through the desert and in need of water. They have shared the journey. They have shared each other's suffering. They *know* just how badly each other needs water. When the water wagon appears miraculously offering cups of cold water, why would one man take the water but not shake his

companion and say, "Hey, Stan! Wake up! There's a woman pushing a water wagon and she wants to know if we are thirsty!" Wake up! You need this water as much as I do!"

*But no!* The one takes the water and takes life giving sips. When his companion awakes he tells him, "I thought about telling you about the water wagon; but I wasn't sure if I should wake you!"

Which is more a violation of a person's condition: intruding into their lives with good news or making the decision for the person but letting them sleep? Both are decisions made on behalf of somebody. One at least gives the person the opportunity to make a choice. After all the guy in the desert could say, "No, I'll die here." But at least he had a choice. Not waking him for the penultimate virtues of acceptance and tolerance makes the decision for him, with potentially tragic consequences.

Put this way, it kind of makes a body angry!

If this is so for a literal cup of cold water, how much more might it be so when the desert and the water are spiritual? I believe American culture is in many ways a materialistic desert. People are not dying on the outside. But many of us are dying on the inside. In years past the church served as an oasis during the week where people could be reminded that a loving God provides all his children with everything necessary for full and satisfying life. They would be reminded that there are values which go beyond family, community, nation and political affiliation. There is a loving God who is bigger than any human ability to comprehend and who waters the deserts of our lives and leads us to what Jesus calls, "living water" which satisfies our deepest thirst for connection with God.

Isn't that why we are here? Don't we come to worship to receive a cup of cold refreshing water to satisfy the thirst that no amount of bottled water can touch? Indeed isn't the life we share together in large part designed to help us find cups of cold water throughout the week, in all of our relationships?

And if we are actually receiving this living water, why would we allow the water wagon pass by without letting people know that it is here? We can but offer this water to a sister or brother. But don't we have a responsibility to wake them up. Is it enough to take the cup of water for ourselves?

Let me propose just a few cups of water we can give:

1. The cup of time. How many people experience others as being too busy to be interested in their lives?

2. The cup of truly listening to someone for their sake. How many people wonder if anyone cares to listen to them and to seek to understand how they experience life?

3. The cup of personal openness. How many people rarely have the experience of someone sitting with them as one human with another? How many people might be surprised that we are slogging through the same desert—only we know how and where to find the water wagon lady?

4. The cup of invitation. How many people have never actually been invited into a spiritual community? How many people might, when asked if they wanted a cup of water would wake up and say yes!

This is not about converting people or getting them to believe what we believe. It is one thirst person helping another find water. Amen.