

SERMON AT GELORUP 1/7/2017: GEOFF CHADWICK
"NERO"
Matthew 10.40-42

⁴⁰ 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'

A few years ago, Gabby and I managed to do a hike through the Viros Gorge near the town of Kardamyli on the Western Coast of Greece. There's a rough track that takes you over limestone hills, down into the gorge and past the old town ruins, an abandoned basilica and a disused Orthodox Monastery. Being natural introverts, we enjoyed this quiet walk in the foothills. Now, as often happens in ancient parts of the world, the path took us through people's back yards. At one point as we gained altitude amongst the hills we suddenly found ourselves in an old house yard full of ramshackle sheds and marauding chooks. Now, I'm not sure what the Modern Greek word for "Chook" is but these Greek chickens seemed to have the same accent as our chickens here in Australia. Now it was summer, and although we carried plenty of water we were hot and a little parched by the time we had climbed the rise. Once in the chook yard, and feeling a bit self-conscious about being in private property I was keen to keep moving. Then I heard a crackly old voice behind me:

"Nero!" was the call.

I heard the call but the word did not register with me. After all, I studied New Testament Greek – totally useless for the modern world!

The voice called again:

"Nero!", "Nero!"

Then the “Penny dropped”, and I suddenly remembered that *nero* is the Modern Greek word for water. (not *hydros* as you might think.)

I turned, and there behind me was a sight I will remember for the rest of my life. An elderly, weather beaten, peasant woman, with obligatory missing teeth, was smiling at me, holding up a running hose of water. She had been watering her chooks.

Gesturing with the word *nero* again, I instantly understood her. She was offering me water to drink. I took the hose sipped at the water and as my thirst was relieved, so seemed her concern for me. What could be simpler: To offer a drink of cold water to a stranger and to have the stranger receive it!

Gabby saw this happen, and somehow the urge to photograph every significant event on this holiday did not take hold of her at this moment. How right that seemed! This was a moment to be remembered in memory not to be ruined by the intrusion of a lens. It was a moment of pure humanity- one person offering a simple gift of water to another.

As soon as I had had my fill of “chook” water, today’s Gospel reading came to my mind:

⁴⁰ 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me... and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.' (Mtt 10:40 ff)

I like to think that that kind, elderly, peasant woman received her reward. Every now and again I like to think that she had an Orthodox background and knew this verse as a basic fact of following Jesus. I will never know. Nevertheless, I did manage to thank her with

“epharisto” the Modern Greek for *“thank you”* which, by the way, has the same root as our word *“Eucharist.”*

Imagine that: Eucharist with chook water rather than bread and wine!

This little encounter in the hills of Greece has reminded me of an influential book written by EF Schumacher in 1973, entitled Small Is Beautiful. A social scientist encouraged me to read this when I was about 18 years old and its ideas still influence my thinking. (These few years on!) Schumacher’s basic thesis was that the modern world was in danger of idolising *“Giantism”*: thinking that *“bigger is better.”* Bigger companies, bigger cities, and *“bigger technology”* would solve the world’s problems. He argued that smaller solutions are needed. Small solutions which consider the circumstances of the *“small people”* would be more effective than *“giant”* large scale plans. And so he coined the phrase: *“Small is beautiful.”*

I think we could also call this the *“cup of cold water”* principle. Whilst we might want to solve the world’s big problems with big solutions, maybe we should just begin with small gestures. Offering simple *“cups of cold water.”* As we begin with small gestures, larger solutions will happen.

Whilst this might seem naïve, I believe it is a good antidote to being overwhelmed. As we look at the world, read the newspapers, and watch the news I think it’s easy to think we have nothing to offer. The danger is that we can be numbed into inaction and think we cannot make a difference. *“Giantism”* can lead to inaction.

But Jesus tells us otherwise. *"Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones"* has its reward. Or in the words of EF Schumacher: *"Small is beautiful."*

So let us remember that the small things we all do in the name of Jesus do count for something.

- The quick prayer when you don't know what else to do.
- The care packages we give to the Women's refuge.
- The comfort given to an inconsolable child.
- A gift of *nero* to a foreign hiker found in your backyard.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.