

## Scripture and Sermon for July 5, 2015

### Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Justus and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that

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all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

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As you know, I got married two weeks ago, after which Jeff, Hannah, Cole and I went on a ‘familymoon’ (or a family honeymoon) to Disney World in Florida. As we all know, leaving home for any amount of time can require lots of preparation: you may need to tidy the house, stop the mail (or arrange for someone to take it in), plan for the care of pets, arrange transportation and lodging, get money out of the bank and of course you must pack!

Since becoming a mother I have discovered what I think is the truest challenge of packing... **children!** You see, I have been blessed with two fiercely independent children who want to pack their own suitcases. Now, not only am I responsible for remembering to pack all of my own essentials and comforts, but I have to be sure my children have, also, while not taking away their independence. There can be many unpleasant consequences for not packing well for a trip, including tears for not having the desired stuffed animal or blanket, and frustration when we realize someone has packed too few pairs of underwear! Packing can become the most stressful part of the trip!

So, what if we were to head out on a journey without taking a thing with us; without making travel and lodging plans, with no clothes to change into, with no money for food or incidentals? In today’s world, here in the United States, we probably would not get very far without planning or packing. After all,

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EVERYTHING costs money and these days' people are often too skeptical to offer hospitality to a stranger.

In this morning's Gospel lesson, however, this is exactly what Jesus tells his disciples to do: to go out with nothing but a partner and a stick and share the Good News of God's love with everyone who will listen. And if they won't listen? No problem, wipe the dust from your feet and keep on moving.

So, why does Jesus send them out with nothing? I believe Jesus understands that luggage can weigh you down. That **stuff** can distract us from the goal of the journey. Our creature comforts, those snuggly pajamas or a favorite stuffed animal, can cause us to forget what we are doing and why.

\*PAUSE\*

I wonder though: Does Jesus really send them out with nothing? I do not believe so. Jesus has equipped the Twelve with his teachings. Throughout his ministry, Jesus has had them witness the power of God's love, justice and mercy through the miracles he has performed and his *openness to otherness*. Jesus has helped them understand their God-given gifts and to feel God's love for themselves.

Now we might understand HOW Jesus sent his disciples, but do we understand WHY? The goal: to use God's love to cast out demons and heal the sick. We

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read that Jesus gave them the authority to do these things. We are not told how the disciples reacted to this charge, but it feels like a pretty tall order to me!

(please bear with metaphor) I will be completely honest with you: the worst part of packing for me is really UNPACKING (my suitcase is the only one still not ready to be put away!). What fun is it to unpack? You must put away everything you needed or wanted for your trip (some of which you may not have even used) and then you must find places for all of the new stuff you have acquired. Unpacking forces us to admit that our journey is over and that we must get back to the realities of home life. However, in order to pack for the next journey we **MUST** unpack from this one.

I believe Jesus has gone one step further than we read about in our text this morning. Understanding our human nature and how we all carry 'emotional' baggage, I believe Jesus helped his disciples to **UNPACK** before embarking on their journey.

What do I mean by UNPACKING for their journey? I mean letting go of their preconceived notions of what the mission will be like. Jesus recognizes that we ALL carry around the emotional baggage of opinions and perceptions, beliefs and values. We are products of our upbringings and our experiences. Jesus invites the twelve to lay down their

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expectations and fears of the unknown and to go out with an open mind and an open heart.

With the unwelcoming response of the people in his own home town, Jesus taught his disciples that they will likely meet opposition as they travel, even from people they already know. He prepared them by letting them know they could run into people who were not interested in what they were being called to share and do and that some might disagree with their message while others could be unwilling to even listen.

The disciples were not sent out unprepared and empty handed... they were equipped with all they needed for this journey.

Jesus calls and sends each of us on the same mission today. You and I are called to combat the unclean spirits in our own time and place. We are called to set aside our complacency with the way things are and to bring the light of God's love to ALL those we meet along the way.

Who are We to be called and sent on such an important mission and how do WE go about doing this?

When we turn on the news it is not hard to identify the unclean spirits or demons of today: **racism, prejudice & hatred of the unknown/otherness.** Sometimes it is easier to turn off the radio and TV and close the newspaper than it is to acknowledge the

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struggles of our world. There is so much to fear. We see examples of continued racism in this country in the devastating shooting in South Carolina. We see examples of hatred with people lashing out against the Supreme Court decision allowing gay marriage in all 50 states.

We are beloved children of God whom God loves for all that we are and who God has gifted with a variety of gifts for sharing love with our world.

Before we embark on this mission commissioned by God for each of us we MUST unpack! Unpack our prejudices and judgements of what we think is right or wrong, faithful or not faithful. Unpacking can be very difficult but it can also be very freeing!

Theologian David Lose reminds us that:

“All too often, we are tempted to reduce someone who challenges us to a single attribute about that person – whether skin color or age or orientation – in order to dismiss them and thereby fail to receive the totality of the person God has created and redeemed and offered to us as a gift.

This mission to announce the kingdom and share God’s love, as it turns out, will take more than just one miracle worker, it will take a team of people empowered, equipped, and sent to witness to God’s grace, justice, and mercy.”

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WE ARE A PART OF THAT TEAM! We are called to share God's unconditional love with ALL. While on our 'family moon' we rode the Disney attraction, 'It's a Small World.' This is a boat ride which takes you through vibrant and colorful expressions of the cultures of the globe. The song that is played throughout the attraction says: "It's a world of laughter, a world of tears, a world of hopes and a world of fears. There's so much that we share that it's time we're aware it's a small world after all!"

This ride in Disney World is a beautiful expression of how we can celebrate our differences while focusing on the fact that underneath our racial, cultural, or orientation dissimilarities we are all the same. We are all children of God, loved by God and worthy of each other's love.

Jesus does not say the journey will be easy but Jesus does equip us with all we need. *If we have faith in our God who has faith in us, we can and will make a difference in our communities and our world.*

Elizabeth Eaton, the presiding bishop of the evangelical Lutheran church in America invites us to, "seek to see our differences as a gift to be celebrated as we live out that which unites us: the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ who leads us into mission and ministry in the world."

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I would like to close by sharing with you Eugene Patterson's version of our Gospel text for today from his translation, *The Message*:

<sup>7-8</sup> Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition. He sent them off with these instructions:

<sup>8-9</sup> "Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. **You are the equipment.** No special appeals for funds. Keep it simple.

<sup>10</sup> "And no luxury inns. Get a modest place and be content there until you leave.

<sup>11</sup> "If you're not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Don't make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way."

<sup>12-13</sup> Then they were on the road. They preached with **joyful urgency that life can be radically different**; right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits.

Jesus does NOT call the disciples or us to force our beliefs and ideas on others. Jesus does NOT ask us to convert others to our faith.

Jesus DOES call us to be expressions of God's open and welcoming love to ALL.

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**We are the equipment God has chosen to use** for this mission. So let us lighten our load of judgements and fears. And may we go out with *joyful urgency to make our world a radically different place* consumed by love and acceptance!

AMEN