

Set Free to Be, Tell & Do

6 Pentecost B July 4, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

Gospel: Mark 6:1-13

At home & abroad, Jesus & his disciples encounter resistance as they seek to proclaim God's word & relieve affliction.

¹Jesus came to his hometown, & his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, & 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! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary & brother of James & Joses & Judas & Simon, & are not his sisters here with us?" & they took offense at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, & among their own kin, & in their own house." ⁵& Jesus could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people & cured them. ⁶& he was amazed at their unbelief. Then Jesus went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve & began to send them out two by two, & gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals & not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you & they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹²So they went out & proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, & anointed with oil many who were sick & cured them.

Ready to Bear Witness

While it isn't entirely clear why the people of Nazareth reject Jesus, the fact that they do may sound familiar to us. How often do we find exactly what we expect when we encounter something new? How open are we, really, to the possibility that God's power might come from an unexpected corner? The first part of today's reading suggests that even miracles take 2 things: both divine power & willing witnesses. God & Jesus can always heal without our partnership (e.g. raising Lazarus) yet the presence of faith makes a huge difference.

Perhaps Jesus sends his disciples out stripped of their possessions precisely so that *they* are ready to witness to God's power in a new way. They go without any of the usual trappings of security or wealth, with no guarantee that their ministry will be received. In fact, Mark reminds us later (Mark 6:14-28) just how hostile the world can

be to receiving the proclamation of the kingdom of God. John the Baptist will lose his life because of Herod's resistance to repentance (recognition of & allegiance to a change in the power structure of the world NOT an accounting of my sins & confession for them). Nevertheless, Jesus' teaching continues to astound, & the Word continues to spread.

Theological Reflection

This Sunday is Independence Day in the US. Consider Martin Luther's treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian* in tandem with today's gospel. What would it mean to not just represent but to embody freedom in Christ for the sake of one another, as opposed to conflating the expansiveness of Christian freedom w/ the selective nature of nationalistic freedom?

Theological Reflection

Jesus encourages the disciples to "shake the dust from their feet" as testimony against a bad encounter as they go about their missional work. How often do we carry negative encounters with us from station to station in this life? Feel encouraged to reflect on what you continue to carry from bad encounters, perhaps even bad encounters within the community of the faithful? Mercy, reconciliation, forgiveness, & resilience are all at play in this one act. If we carry around with us all the dust from bad encounters, eventually our missional feet won't be able to move because they'll be too weighed down! In confession & forgiveness, we are given an opportunity to shake off some of that dust, & in the eucharist we are given the bread (that Jesus invites us to not take along) so that we can continue the journey. This is the cycle of discipleship!

Faith as Journey

That believers are sent out on a **journey** has been a beloved image throughout church life. Taking this passage literally, many missionaries have journeyed throughout the world. Christianity is a missionary religion, infused with the commission to spread the work of repentance & healing everywhere. In medieval times, a journey to a sacred shrine was sometimes ordered as penance for sin. Especially in Europe, pilgrimages are again popular. But even in one's regular secular life, the image of one's years as a journey remains important for many people. For Christians, the journey through life to death is always a journey with & toward God.

Mark 6:1-13

That Jesus' mother but no father is named has led to various interpretations, including the suggestion of illegitimacy. Mark has told us of Jesus' success with the crowds. They have listened to the word expressed in parables; they have seen him heal the sick. He has commissioned & instructed the twelve, showing them that he has power over nature, sickness & even death. Now Jesus leaves the "place" where he has healed the woman & Jairus' daughter, & comes to his "hometown" in Galilee, with those who trust in him. His reception in the synagogue is different from that in [1:21-28](#); they now ask: *Who is this guy? How can a mere carpenter be so wise? It doesn't add up: how can he possibly do supernatural deeds?* "They took offence at him" (v. [3](#)): the rejection begins. (The word translated as offence also means stumbling block.) Jesus rebuts: Israel has often rejected prophets who came to save her. Because the people of his "hometown" lack faith, he does few miracles there (v. [5](#)). Perhaps as a result of rejection at home, Jesus concentrates on rural areas. He sends out "the twelve" (v. [7](#)) to minister, to extend his proclaiming of God's Kingdom in word & action; they too will heal, mostly by exorcism ("unclean spirits"). His orders to them (vv. [8-9](#)) are set in first-century Palestine; because of the urgency of the mission & the need to trust in God, they are to subordinate material & physical concerns to the task of preaching, as he does. They are not to waste time seeking better accommodation (v. [10](#)); nor on those who refuse to listen: just move on (v. [11](#)). They are to do what Jesus has begun (v. [12](#)). Mark indicates that Jesus' followers are to carry on the ministry of Jesus by preaching repentance, exorcizing, & healing. Week after week, receiving the word of repentance & the gifts of healing, we are sent out to proclaim the word of God to the world over the powers of all the world's demons...we rely on the power of Christ.

- A) Nazareth's people miss out on who Jesus really is because of unconscious &/or chosen patterns of thinking. What makes us so stuck in our way of seeing things? What will it take to break us out of listening to our own voices/myths/traditions at the expense of missing God's new thing? What would you have said to the people of Nazareth?
- B) The disciples are sent out totally dependent on God's presence through others. Yet they are sent to Be the Apostles, Tell God's Story and Bring Healing to others. We are gifted and sent to do the same. Have you in some way done that last week? How 'bout today?