

Mark 6:1-13

6He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. ²On 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! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and 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 and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If 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.’ ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Reaching Out...Even When It's Not Comfortable

I told Lori, Barbara, and Jason that they would need to recruit a few folks for today's "presentation" because there were a lot of extras needed, so I'm curious about the folks who volunteered, if they felt a particular connection to the part they chose. And whether you volunteered or not, I'm curious where you see yourself in today's story. We actually have two stories; Jesus rejected in his hometown of Nazareth and Jesus sending out the disciples, who proclaimed repentance, cast out demons, and cured the sick. So you have a lot of characters to choose from:

1. Jesus
2. One of the unbelieving folks
3. Someone who has been healed
4. A disciple

If you had to pick one of these, who would you be? Most folks would not pick Jesus because that's too arrogant. Some folks who are honest and unafraid may say they are among the skeptical, the unbelieving. Some of you may have a personal testimony of God's healing in your life be it physical or spiritual. And some of you may with some reticence say, "I *guess* I'm a disciple (?)" Perhaps you're reluctant to call yourself a disciple because you feel that would be nearly as arrogant as calling yourself Jesus – after all the first disciples usually have the word "Saint" preceding their names; that's better than "Doctor." And perhaps it's because you don't meet the job requirements as listed here – proclaiming repentance, casting out demons, and curing the sick. I would guess that the majority of Christians feel most comfortable in the third category – the healed. And some of you might just add a fifth category: call it *witness* – you have *seen* God working in yourself or in others. And you might not feel that you've been *healed* of anything, but you can testify to God doing something somewhere in someone, and so you can

claim faith. But most people don't want to testify. They prefer to be *passive* witnesses; they don't want to be an "in-your-face" witness who's telling everyone about Jesus and salvation; they don't want to rock the boat. They don't want to upset anyone or make others feel uncomfortable, because that would make *them* feel uncomfortable.

Because people don't want to feel uncomfortable. That's the reason we strive to keep routines; there's something comforting about doing the same thing and getting the same results, and when something upsets the predictable and the routine, we feel anxious or disoriented. I've had this discussion with my wife; she loves fresh fruit and can't understand why people would rather drink orange juice than eat an actual orange, and I told her it's predictability. It's also convenience, but I think when people pour a glass of Tropicana orange juice you know it's going to taste like the Tropicana orange juice that you drank yesterday. When you peel an orange you're not sure if it's going to be sweet or sour, dry or juicy – yes we have our techniques of determining whether fruit will be fresh and juicy, but you don't have to bother with Tropicana orange juice; you know it's going to taste the same as the orange juice you drank last year. You get up in the morning, and you look at our alarm clock, and you trust that it's displaying the correct time. If it's blinking – indicating that there was a power outage, your heart starts to race (one of the reasons smart phones are so popular is that they only rely on Con Edison to get their charge, so you can feel safe and secure that the time displayed on your smart phone is the correct time). The average worker *wants* a steady paycheck; you want to *know* what you earn so that you can plan and predict. Anyone who's been working the same job for awhile knows what time they need to leave the house to arrive at work on time, and you make adjustments based on the weather or construction, and if you wake up and find that your street is closed because of a bike race, you may get a little irritated because you have a routine and now that routine can't be kept. You know what I mean: there is safety in routine and predictability.

This is why Jesus' message is not so welcomed by people, particularly people in his hometown. Jesus grew up there; he went to PS 6 and shopped at the local supermarket. He took up his father's trade (predictably) and did good work at a fair price, and that's what people came to expect of him. He was not a stranger in Nazareth, but what was strange was this new message that he is spreading and all this talk about healings and miracles. This is just weird stuff. First of all, there's this message of repentance. Repentance means change, and folks *don't want to change*, and I think folks are especially offended if *you* tell them that they need to change. Then there's the notion of the Kingdom of God coming upon them, which may sound nice, but does that mean that I can continue to live my life just the way I'm living it now? Will I have to change? Well, yes; that's why you must *repent*. People were comfortable, and Jesus was making them uncomfortable.

I think that people both inside and outside the church are just as resistant to change as people were in Jesus' day. That's why more people would characterize themselves as *witnesses* at best, but certainly not disciples. A witness simply has to *believe* in something they've witnessed or felt (I was very sick, I prayed, and I got better, i.e. I *witnessed* God's healing in my life). A witness simply tells someone about something, and maybe that story will get someone else to *believe* in Jesus Christ. But a disciple strives to do what the teacher tells them to do. A disciple tells people of their need to repent and that God's Kingdom is at hand, which in our current context means telling people what is right and wrong and teaching children about God's everlasting love and

acknowledging God's active role in our lives and in our world. A disciple casts out demons and heals the sick, which in our current context can take many forms from relief work in disaster-stricken places to confronting injustice in our society or anywhere in the world. A disciple goes places where he's not always welcome and says things that aren't always nice to hear. Do you know how I can tell that I've been a good disciple of Jesus Christ? When people complain about what I've said or done, because they have grown comfortable with the way things are, and I'm telling them that things are going to change. The Christian message is quite simple: God's kingdom is coming, and either you're probably *not* going to be thrilled about it unless you make some changes in your life. God will be thrilled to have you in his kingdom; the question is will you want to be there.

And do you know what the hardest part of discipleship is for me? It's shaking the dust off my feet. Symbolically that means moving on when the message has failed to take hold. And as long as a person is motivated by love of God and love of humanity, moving on hurts. But it has to be done, because we have a mission, and not everyone will be on board with that mission.

So I'm afraid that we Methodists are big into discipleship. There are churches that just want you to be sheep, to do what you're told and be happy that you're in the Church, where you celebrate God's amazing grace and say to yourself, "Thank God I found Jesus." But with Methodists there's a next step – to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world – that's what we claim as our mission at the end of each worship service, and it's not an easy mission either.

Which may be why Jesus sends the disciples out in pairs; you need someone to help you, and you need someone to keep you inspired and on message. Unless we take on the mantle of discipleship as Jesus calls us to do, our lives will be less than fulfilling, and without someone beside you along the way to encourage you and who you can encourage, who can keep you accountable and be held accountable, your discipleship will flounder.