

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July 15, 2018
Mark 6:7-13**

Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Which of these two methods would you prefer to use to spread an important message? Would you prefer to have a perfect messenger or an imperfect one? By that I mean, would you rather have a person who never messes anything up? Or a person who is prone to errors and blunders? Would you prefer a person who possesses perfect confidence or one who tends to be timid and afraid? Which messenger would you prefer to have? One who is perfect or imperfect?

I know which one I would want and would choose. My preference would be for the perfect messenger because they wouldn't get anything wrong. Odds are most of you would too. However, do you know who didn't choose a perfect messenger to get his message out? Jesus. Our gospel lesson shows Jesus using imperfect messengers to share his message of salvation with people who don't know him and do you know what? He still uses you and me (imperfect people) to do the same today.

Our gospel lesson shows us the method Jesus has chosen to spread his message throughout the world. The first thing he does is he sends followers into the world in order to spread his message to others. **“Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.”** Jesus calls his followers to himself and he gives them a mission. He wants them to go out and spread his message to the people they come into contact with.

However, there is an important fact to recognize about our gospel lesson. It comes before the end of Jesus' life. Jesus wasn't sending his followers into the entire world just yet. He would send them out into the world after he had died and rose from the dead. Our lesson is about an opportunity Jesus gave to his followers which was a preview of the work he was going to have them do in the world. This taste of ministry was still part of their training.

How does Jesus' chosen method to spread his word apply to you and me? Jesus still wants his message to be shared with people who don't know him and he still wants his followers to spread his message. This means Jesus wants you and me to share him with others who don't know him. The task which he gave to his disciples is now our task because we have the same Jesus they did, but now the question becomes: how? How do we reach out to others?

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How would you like to have been one of the disciples receiving these instructions from Jesus? He wants you to go out and share his message with people who need to hear it, but did you hear what he wants you to take? He didn't want you to take any money along. Or food. He didn't even want you to take extra clothes along. All he wanted them to do was to go out into the world and preach his message. What was Jesus trying to teach the disciples with these instructions?

Jesus was trying to teach them to trust in him. The reason Jesus didn't want them to take money or food or extra clothes along was because he wanted the disciples to be focused on spreading his message in

the world. How would they eat? Where would they stay? Jesus would provide these things for his disciples through the people they served. It would take a lot of trust on the disciples' part to listen to and follow Jesus' instructions for them.

Trust was a key part of Jesus' instructions, but there was also opportunity in them too. Jesus didn't just randomly send his disciples out into the world. He gave them a targeted audience. We don't see it in our lesson, but in a parallel account to our lesson Jesus instructed his disciples to go to the lost sheep of Israel and share his message with them. These instructions gave his disciples a targeted audience to share his message with.

The lost sheep of Israel included faithful Jews who would go to the synagogue on Saturdays. The Apostle Paul gives us a pattern which he might have borrowed from Jesus' disciples. Paul would always go to the synagogue first (provided there was one in the city) whenever he entered a new town. It was a wise move on his part because he was able to make contacts with faithful Jews and introduce them to Christ. The synagogue would have been a natural place for the disciples to start too.

How do Jesus' instructions apply to us? Jesus hasn't called us to leave everything behind when reaching out to people, but his instructions raise an interesting question. Do you think it was very comfortable for the disciples to go out on the road without money or food or extra clothes? Do you think it was easy for them to trust Jesus would take care of them? No, it wasn't easy or comfortable. It was scary to think about because it required them to get out of their comfort zone.

Now, apply Jesus instructions to you. He still wants you to get out of your comfort zone and share him with others. One of the things which seems to be "off limits" when it comes to conversations is religion. It seems some people are perfectly accepting of your religion until you try to witness to them and make things uncomfortable for you when do try to witness to them. What do you do? Yes, it is scary to think about, but Jesus still wants us to reach out to others even if we are uncomfortable.

Now, you might object and think, "Yes, Jesus asked the disciples to be uncomfortable, but they had a huge advantage. Jesus gave them a readymade audience to reach out to. It isn't fair and I don't really want to put myself out there without the advantage." I get it. The disciples did have a readymade audience, but do you know what? Most of you do too. I'm fairly certain most of you have either friends or family who don't know Jesus or who have drifted in their relationship with him.

I understand it is scary to think about getting uncomfortable on Jesus' behalf, but when you know the person and have a relationship with the person it is a bit easier. How come? The person knows you and you know them. You trust each other. You love each other and this love and respect is a natural bridge for you. Yes, it might be scary and uncomfortable, but the person trusts you and you'll have opportunity to use this natural trust to share Jesus with someone.

How can you be sure your work won't be in vain and you made yourself uncomfortable for no good reason? **"They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."** Jesus' disciples went out and followed his

instructions and do you know what happened? Jesus blessed their efforts. They were able to do exactly what he promised they would be able to do and spread the message of his kingdom.

The reason Jesus wants us to become uncomfortable and put ourselves out there on his behalf is because he will bless our efforts. Jesus died for all people and he wants all people to come to faith in him. Yes, some people are going to reject him and his message, but not everyone will. Jesus has promised his word will work in the world. He will bless your efforts to reach out to someone you love and care about.

The hard part is we don't know who is going to listen to us and who won't. It can be incredibly discouraging when we reach out to people and we don't see any results or a conversation doesn't go the way you want it to go. I understand, but when you experience disappointment share it with a fellow Christian. Fellow Christians will encourage you that Jesus is pleased with you because you faithfully shared him with someone who didn't know him.

Finally, we need to remember an important fact about the world. It is filled with sinners who are hurting and lonely. Jesus could have used angels (perfect messengers) to bring his message to a hurting world, but he didn't. He has chosen to use sinners like you and me. This gives you and me a tremendous advantage which angels would never have. You know what it is like to be hurt and broken. You know the damage which sin causes in your life, but you know the peace and love only Jesus brings.

You and I have the ability to show peace and love to others who need it because they don't have Jesus. How do you show this peace and love to others? You can listen to them when they hurt. You can show them kindness when they are in need. You can speak kindly to them when they spew hateful words at you and by doing this you will reflect Christ's love to sinners and who knows? Perhaps Jesus will use your words and actions to bring that person into heaven. May God bless our efforts. Amen.