

Mark 6:1-13

Jesus is in the Northern half of the sea of Galilee (at Capernaum and the surrounding villages). Up until now they followed Jesus but now he is sending them out ...it's like an "internship," ...a training time while Jesus was still around.

Jesus meanwhile goes to his hometown of Nazareth a little further inland...and at his local synagogue they can't believe this is the same kid that grew up around here! What's that saying: "familiarity breeds contempt!"

Ain't this Jesus... that blue-collar workers kid?! How would you feel about someone you thought you knew growing up to be ordinary...and then they turned out to be extraordinary!? Would you be skeptical or jealous even?! Do we often take folks for granted based on our preconceived notions of them...or what we think we know about them? Happens all the time! People aren't memes or sounbites!

Then Jesus empowers His own students and sends them out...and guess what... these nobodies and any bodies also begin to do some extraordinary things... just like their Rabbi!

See their mission is exactly the same as Jesus'... teaching and healing...and calling people back to God! For as Jesus has proclaimed the kingdom of God is here. Jesus now sends them out ...to sow the seeds of the kingdom of God in the surrounding neighborhoods.

At first, Jesus' followers are Disciples...open, humble students just learning from their Rabbi...Now they are to go out and practice what Jesus taught them...they now have to go out and walk the talk...the word apostle is now used and that word specifically means... one who is sent... so Jesus now changes their focus from students... to now those who are sent out in Jesus' name...to practice for real what He has been teaching them all along.

It is also a preview of the ministry Jesus gives us all each and every Sunday here... We are also to go out bringing His message and God's grace wherever we go once we leave here.

And they are to go out "in pairs." For Safety, For Encouragement, To Witness and to Connect in Relationship...this is ministry and mission done together. Whenever you have to do something dangerous, or risky, or unknown... you're gonna want somebody by your side.

We're all in this together as followers of Christ, and two people will always complement one another and support one another... while also sharing in successes and in failures...

Christian Lone Rangers quickly tend to get themselves into trouble...that's' why we also follow this model here in our church.

And those out there in need of God's word, love, and presence are just as plentiful today as they were in Jesus' time...probably more so!

In fact, the fastest growing religious group today in America are the "nones"! And I don't have to tell you that church attendance everywhere is down...and I don't have to ask you where all the young folks are!

People today who feel a connection to something greater than themselves will quickly tell you that they are spiritual... just not religious.

People want God...they want connection... but they may not want the baggage that goes along with our religions! And also we have lots of "religious folk" who never set foot in a church...so WHY is this?

Well my own opinion on the subject goes back to the word apostle and also to the word church that Jesus used in the gospels.

The word Apostle means one who is sent... and the word Church ecclesia is a call to action - a verb. So where is the focus and direction of God and Jesus?

Does Jesus sit around and wait for everyone to come to Him? Or does Jesus take God out there on the road? Out into the world...out into the kingdom of man... so that they may see and experience the Kingdom of God where they are!

When Jesus uses the word church, it's in Caesarea Philippi literally standing outside the gates of Hades. Jesus was taking God right into the Heart of ancient day Las Vegas to bring up this notion of Church.

It is an action... something that people do in community with other people...and somewhere along the line we have made the church about the rules and the place and less about the people...see the temple system died with Jesus... and it seems to be dying once again. We try and lock up God and Jesus in our buildings where we can control things...

I love a visual that Rob Droste used to use when he was with us. He showed a graphic of a fish tank on a pier. Our movement is trying to get the fish into our beautiful, safe, and cozy fish tank rather than to be out there in the rough, fish-eat-fish, sea...but how many fish do you think actually jump out of the sea and choose to be in the tank? None!

Again God's word and God's Spirit moves outward!

God IS in here... but God IS also out there... and we are sent from this place OUT there into the world. You think that our world could use some more grace, forgiveness, kindness, love, joy and peace. The world won't find it in this building...but it will find it in you...especially when YOU are out there in the world spreading God's gifts.

These are the people Jesus sends out today...that's YOU! And just like today... Jesus warns us that not everyone's gonna be receptive...expect resistance and expect rejection! In fact, more Christians are persecuted today than at any time in human history.

And in this country, you will be met by many different kinds of resistances... like personal spirituality tailored to meet the needs of a specific community or a specific individual...

This is the Jesus model as YOUR personal savior...all about you...creating God in YOUR image to look and to think JUST LIKE YOU...what a coincidence... and even some churches can be guilty of this tailor made form of Christianity.

And even worse, and more commonly, we may be met with apathy! See if it doesn't meet my wants and needs...then I really don't care!

But Jesus is clear...He sends out God's message of love, hope and healing into our broken and needy world regardless of the reception or the outcome.

Notice how Jesus only tells them what they should do and doesn't say anything about measuring their success or the results. If people aren't receptive to the message, He says, just shake it off and continue on...

In our Churches today it's difficult to avoid measuring success. We love our metrics...I like to say in God we trust all others bring Data!

We live with Annual Sunday attendance, Stewardship levels, Salaries and maintenance on our buildings...

We measure our work by the data...and that's how many of us including the diocese measure our ministries... but that's contrary to what Jesus was teaching His students....We are not to worry about the results in spreading and living into the gospel.

Remember he told them the parable of the seed Sower... and the seeds may fall on hard or thorny ground... but Jesus still sows those seeds anyway all over the place...regardless of the results... Jesus doesn't just plant seeds in fertile prepared soil...cause you never know when the ordinary... might just transform... into something extraordinary!

Fling the Gospel all over the place... then let go...sometimes it results in nothing much... and other times the results are quite miraculous!

As apostles of Jesus we must show others what the kingdom of God looks like... by sowing the seeds of Christ regardless of the outcome. Seeds of Kindness, of Love, of Compassion, of Forgiveness...so that these seeds will bear and multiply God's fruit out there in the world.

Through the Gospel shared ...and more importantly through the Gospel lived...The Kingdom of God will become a reality to be experienced today. And where are you to sow those seeds... Everywhere! And just like a weed you never know where they may take hold and grow and spread!

You know sometimes the places that are least open to Jesus' teachings can be right inside a church itself...right here in Jesus' hometown!

Jesus' harshest words throughout all the Gospels are always aimed at those who should "KNOW BETTER"...those familiar with God and Jesus...And He holds them accountable... especially those Pharisees (Me) and His own Disciples (You). To follow Jesus means to mirror Jesus' ministry to the world!

And like the ancient Rabbinical model... the students are empowered to do what their Rabbi can do...Remember Peter...he actually did walk on the water...Peter and Paul did raise people from the dead...all the apostles cast out demons and healed...they all brought about the extraordinary kingdom of God wherever they went.

And even Jesus tells His disciples later on... that you will do greater things than these...and guess what...they do! These fishermen...these any bodies all come to be... and do extraordinary things!

So never be surprised, even in your own ministries... when God decides to show up and do extraordinary things through you!

Yet be careful not revel in your own successes too much cause that can easily lead to us believing in our own power...but rather we should act as conduits of God's Grace in the world...and the best part about all this is that we never ever have to worry about the results!

We don't have to apply metrics to our efforts in revealing and spreading God's kingdom.

And as St. Teresa of Avila's well-known saying reminds us... we get to carry on the ministry of Jesus... and NOW we are sent OUT from this place to act and be apostles out there in the world....spreading the gospel to all our neighborhoods...regardless of the results!

She says it like this:

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which He blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body.....Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

So go in peace to love and serve Everyone...sowing the seeds of God's Kingdom Everywhere you may go...taking things ordinary... just like you and me... and experiencing the extraordinary of God's presence...in our lives... and out there in the world...in Jesus' name!

Your faithful servant,
carmen