

July 8, 2018  
Mark 6:1-13

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Each of our Bible passages this morning lift up a common theme paramount and central to our identity as people of God. We are called, gathered, and sent forward with a mission, with a purpose, with a divine blessing, and more often than not this very part of who we are will lead us to places and people who may not be so welcoming, inviting, hospitable, and open to the message we are sent to proclaim. Like the prophet Ezekiel, we might find ourselves speaking God's word to a people unwilling to hear. Or like the Psalmist and his community who cry out to the Lord for mercy as they struggle and perhaps feel alone and isolated due to the contempt, ridicule, and scorn they have endured due to their faith. Or like those first disciples Jesus sent out who, our gospel text tells us, would encounter many in the world who would not welcome them or refuse to hear them just as Jesus experienced in His hometown. Or just as Paul states in his second letter to the Corinthians often our identity runs counter-culture to the ways of the world. A world where often the norm tempts us to boast of our own accomplishments.

A world in which to reveal our weaknesses, be vulnerable, and admit we need help is often perceived as a negative and something better left unsaid.

Yet just as Paul experienced and all believers will experience our lives will be subject to pain, suffering, weakness, and vulnerability. While we don't always know the cause of such pain and suffering, what Paul points out, is that more often than not God's power is most fully revealed in the midst of those times we are utterly dependent upon God's grace and mercy. Paul had asked the Lord three times to take away his pain or his "thorn in the flesh" and each time the Lord's response was "My grace is sufficient for you." Lois Malcolm, Professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary, points out:

The sufficiency of God's grace is directly related to the point that "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). The word for "perfect" (*teleitai*) in this verse is perhaps better translated as "reaches full maturity." We mature as we recognize our weaknesses -- our limits -- and learn to rely ever more deeply on the power of Christ dwelling in us.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, this is one reason Jesus commands his disciples to go forth in our gospel taking next to nothing for their journey. They will be vulnerable and solely dependent upon the hospitality of those they encounter for survival, but also their vulnerability may be just what they need to rely ever more deeply on the power of Christ dwelling with them, which is equipping them to face all that lies ahead of them.

There is no getting around the fact our world is drastically different than the one Jesus encountered and His disciples were sent into to proclaim news of the kingdom. They certainly didn't own as many goods as we do today. In a world where hospitality to the stranger was commonplace it may have been much more likely their daily needs would have been provided for by the unknown people they met. Yet, I still wonder about Jesus sending them out with so very little and how that relates to us today and our context.

I have concluded we don't necessarily need to leave here today and go out in pairs with nothing at all to carry with us as we attempt to live out our identity as followers of Christ; however, perhaps this passage does call us stop, reflect, and even ask ourselves what baggage gets in the way of living into that identity? What do we need to leave behind in order to *rely ever more deeply on the power of Christ dwelling in us* and grow into the fullness of God's abundant grace and mercy? What things limit our ability to totally trust Jesus and grow spiritually in our relationship with Him and experience the healing only He can bring?

Sometimes in our faith journey what is needed is for us to let go – as hard as that may be – and simply come before our Lord with nothing seeking God's mercy upon. Until we let go of all that stuff that hinders us, we may be limiting our ability to see the healing work of Christ in our lives and in the world. It would

seem this stymied the perception of some closest to Jesus in his hometown, who had known him since he was a young boy and watched him grow into a man. They knew his family and they identified him with his trade as a carpenter. Yet, they could not perceive anything beyond that. To see Jesus' true identity and experience the restorative and transformational power of his teaching and healing was hindered because of the long-held societal norms and embedded biases that type-casted Jesus simply as a carpenter from a peasant family and therefore unable to teach the way he did and perform miraculous acts. They had to let go of all this in order to truly see and know him.

It reminds me of a congregation who was struggling to keep their doors open bound by the fear they didn't have enough – people, money, and resources. These were the benchmarks of success they strived to attain in order to once again become a thriving congregation; because, this is what had long identified a congregation as vital. Yet, nothing seemed to work and they questioned God's presence and God's power to bring life into the midst of their slow and painful death. They were vulnerable. Little did they feel like the strong congregation they had been not so long ago; but, rather they were a weak and fragile shell of who they used to be. They may have even felt like those disciples Jesus sent out with next to nothing. Yet, somehow they finally let go of the fact they had virtually

nothing left in the way of people in the pews or money in the coffers. They let go of the fears that without this they were as good as dead. And they finally saw what Christ had given them. A building. A small; but, faithful group of followers of Christ. And their place in a community that had changed dramatically over the years due to a number of corporate shut-downs and changing economy that had left many hungry, in poverty, and even homeless. It was then they saw the mission at hand God was calling them to. They pooled what little they had left, opened their doors, and provided a daily lunch. They let go of programs and things that had worked in the past and simply joined forces and focused on this one thing. At first it was one or two people in the door. Quickly that doubled and then tripled and then grew into hundreds of people. They even put beds in some of the empty classrooms making a temporary shelter. In the midst of it all they proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ to those who entered and assured them God loved them. Soon, many of those people began to come to worship. They were opened to an encounter with the risen Christ. Funds were still scarce but there was enough to do the work Jesus sent them out to do. To encounter Christ in the other and be opened in a new and transformative way to the richness, fullness, and abundance of Jesus' healing and restorative power in their lives, community of faith, and the world.

What do we need to let go of? What fears hinder us? What stereotypes, biases, and personal wants and expectations get the way of our encounter with risen Christ and his ability to use us?

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<sup>1</sup> Lois Malcolm, "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 12:2-10" from [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)