

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 07/04/2021



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, July 4th

Mark 6:1-13

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Doing church as a guest

This week's Gospel lection contains two units of text. The first unit of text (6:1-6) has Jesus visiting His hometown of Nazareth. This passage contrasts the faith of Jairus and the unnamed women in the previous passage (5:21-43) and provokes questions about His identity. The prologue of Mark's Gospel begins by identifying Jesus Christ as "*the Son of God*" (1:1). This identity is fully revealed in the narrative after Jesus dies on the cross and the centurion states, "*Truly this man was the Son of God*" (15:39). Just recently, the disciples who witness Jesus calm the storm upon the Sea of Galilee ponder the question, "*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*" (4:41) In Nazareth among the people who knew Jesus as a boy and still know His family, the question they ask is more along the lines of, "*Who the heck does he think he is?!*" The second unit of text in the lectionary reading reveals how the rejection at Nazareth does not stop Jesus' ministry. If anything, it invigorates it as Jesus sends out the twelve on mission (6:7-13). Jesus sent them out with nothing but their faith and their dependency upon God. Today, the typical local church has turned Jesus' model 180-degrees. We do mission by inviting others to come to us and use our buildings, resources, and programs to attract people. How might things change if we approach ministry more from the vulnerability of a guest rather than the privilege of a host?

Mark 6:1-13 Commentary

While the lectionary readings appear as two distinct units, they connect to the narrative as follows: Jesus calls His disciples, "*Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men*" (1:17), Jesus selects the twelve (3:13-15), Jesus teaches them about the Kingdom (4:1-34), Jesus teaches them about faith (4:35-41; 5:21-45), Jesus teaches them about rejection (6:1-6), and all along the way, Jesus demonstrates His healing and exorcism ministry. Now Jesus sends out the twelve to preach repentance, heal the sick and exorcise demons (6:7-13). Jesus will debrief them when they return and ensure they have Sabbath rest (6:30-32).

¹ *He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.*

Following the encounter with Jairus and the unnamed woman (5:21-43), Jesus continues his itinerant ministry and arrives at His hometown of Nazareth. This is the first time recorded in Mark that Jesus preaches in His hometown.

² *And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?" ³ Is 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 offense at him.*

As was customary, as a travelling teacher Jesus was invited to teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The initial response to His teaching was astonishment (*ekplēssō* – to be utterly amazed). Astonishment quickly turns to offense as the people began to question how could it be that the man they knew and the family they still know could know and do such things? Jesus' familiarity and status in His community had more of an impact than His teachings and healings. Calling into question Jesus' occupation and the "son of Mary" (a possible indication of the continued cloud that followed Mary and the virgin birth). Jewish culture was based on honor-shame. The people's worldview limited their ability to perceive Jesus' true identity.

⁴ And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

Jesus acknowledges He is at least a prophet. Like other prophets before Him (2 Chronicles 36:16; Jeremiah 11:21), He finds no honor from His own family or His home community. One day soon He will face the ultimate rejection in Jerusalem. In v.6a, Jesus "*marveled because of their unbelief*," a description only used elsewhere in Mark for the reaction of the Gentiles to what Jesus had done for the man with the demons (5:20). Jesus left Nazareth and continued on mission, visiting other villages.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— ⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there.

The first aspect of sending out the twelve involved giving them authority (most likely temporary) – equipping them as necessary for this assignment. This was before the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. In the same way, as we are called, we are also equipped. The disciples were also sent out in pairs. This may be related to the requirement of Deuteronomy 17:6 and the need for two witnesses. It also has practical implications such as mutual support and accountability. The significance of what to take and what not to take is to ensure the disciples are dependent upon God rather than themselves. Without food, money, or an extra tunic to wear at night if sleeping outside, they are dependent upon the hospitality of others. This level of vulnerability appears to be the critical experience required to take the disciples beyond their comfort zones and grow them spiritually. The word for bag (*pēra*) could simply be a travel bag to hold items or it could also refer to a begging bag or collecting bag. The disciples were not to receive monies for their services, they were to give, not get. The instruction to stay only at one house in a village was for two reasons. As word spread, many people within a village would likely invite the disciples to stay with them also. From a practical perspective, this would limit the range of travel and thus the spread of their ministry. On a more spiritual level, staying in multiple houses and being passed around like a celebrity would be a risk of becoming comfortable and even prideful, undermining their dependency on God, and undermining the integrity of their ministry.

¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

In Rabbinic law, the dust of a Gentile country was defiled and thus when entering Jewish territory from a Gentile region one had to literally shake the dust of one's feet before crossing the border. Should a village not receive the missionaries or listen to their preaching, they were to treat them as Gentiles. Those who reject the message of Jesus are not God's people. In following Jesus' instructions, the disciples' efforts bear fruit.

Reflections

The rejection of Jesus in His hometown involved the issues of familiarity and status. The people were initially astonished at Jesus' teaching which must have matched the news they had heard about Him. Then reality sunk in. This carpenter-fellow, the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, the guy whose sisters we know... Where did He get all this wisdom from? Based on the comments made about Jesus in the text, he did not appear to come from a family that everyone expected would produce such an inspired teacher. The mood quickly swings from being astonished by Jesus to being offended by Him. The Greek word here rendered as "took offense" *skandalizō* is where we obtain the English word "scandal." As the English proverb goes, familiarity breeds contempt. Ironically, they all knew Jesus, but they did not really *know* Jesus. Only a few sick people were willing to believe. Sometimes our greatest barrier to learning is thinking that we already know.

The instructions in the text for the sending out of the twelve are simple yet provide much insight on what we must do to be on mission for Christ. As Christianity took hold in the West, the nature of mission changed. Today, churches often serve as the primary thrust for local mission. Mission became inviting people to church. If no church were available, one would be planted. According to recent statistics, this model contributes about \$1.2 trillion of socio-economic value to the US economy. This is equivalent to the world's 15th largest national economy.¹ That is a rather large *pēra* or collecting bag. While much is given back to the community, how much is retained?

Over the last few decades, imperceptible at first but now inescapable, the cultural-spiritual landscape has changed. In our post-Christian society, the local missional landscape is now radically different. To make matters even worse, people are still refusing to fully reengage in old-normal society in the afterscape of the pandemic and our society has never been as polarized since the Civil War. Perhaps the pandemic was the final clue that no program or technique will "fix" the church. What does local mission look like during these times? How do we engage our world as disciples of Christ?

The text today suggests we should engage our communities from the vulnerability of a guest rather than the privilege of a host. When we are the host, we certainly welcome and offer hospitality to our guests, but we also think in terms of new member classes, new member orientation, and new member assimilation. The sign that says "All are Welcome" really means all are welcome to assimilate into our unique culture. The vulnerability rests solely with the visitor. When the church leaves the building and engages its community as a guest, we are now the ones who are authentic and vulnerable. We must now rely on God more than our building. We are dependent upon the hospitality of others to receive us rather than push our marketing. By engaging people in our community, we become more aware of the real issues facing the people rather than pushing our off-the-shelf solutions to the issues we think exist from our sometimes distant and privileged perspective. In doing church as a guest, the local church begins to be comprised of mostly local people and reflects the community today rather than being a throwback to another age.

What does this involve? It starts by just walking out into the neighborhood, engaging, and listening. Walking and talking – like Christ demonstrated on the road to Emmaus. People are longing for God to move in our history and in their lives. Perhaps this happens when we show up and be present in the lives of others.

For feedback or to be added or removed from the mailing list, please e-mail david.r.lyons@gmail.com

¹ Brian J. Grimm and Melissa E. Grimm, "The Socio-economic Contribution of Religion to American Society: An Empirical Analysis," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 12, no. 3, (2016): 2-31, <http://www.religjournal.com/pdf/ijrr12003.pdf>