

Reflection for July 7, 2024 – At the Petro Can Inspired by Mark 6:1-13

The Twelve had set out two by two. The best they could do for transportation was to find a few barely roadworthy used vehicles. The fleet consisted of a couple of old Chev. Malibu's, a Volkswagen Golf, a tired old Ford F-150, a 1998 Mazda Sedan with a sunroof that won't close all the way, and a Renault with no back seat and a cracked front window.

Two of the disciples arrive in Peachland on fumes and I get a call that two stranded guys need some gas. I meet them at the Petro Can.

They are both somewhat scruffy looking. They have longish hair and big bushy beards. They are dressed in Blue Jeans with holes in the knees and frayed cuffs. They wear T-shirts that are also visibly worn, and runners that are held together with duct tape. But they are clean and presentable all the same.

I introduce myself as Pastor Ian and say, "Gentleman, good to meet you. I hear you are out of gas." "Yes sir," one of them replies. "We have been travelling up through Penticton and we are just about out." "I'm Simon and this is John." (My Spidey senses are tingling).

"Where are you headed," I ask? "No where in particular," one of them says. "We are touring British Columbia spreading the gospel here first and then we will work through Alberta. There are 6 teams of us. We are dedicating our time to the Okanagan. Jesus sent us out to spread the good news." (Oh dear, I'm wondering now).

"And how is that going" I say?

"We would love to talk to you about that if you have a few minutes," says Simon.

Well, I didn't fall off the turnip truck only yesterday and I'm no fool, but I am compelled to listen. I wonder what I am getting myself into, but I'm thinking perhaps I can provide some pastoral guidance. (That's what I do after all!) It is Thursday afternoon, and I am not in a rush today, so I agree to sit and listen for a few minutes. I grab three coffees from A&W, and we sit outside at a table there. It is a lovely hot July afternoon.

John begins, "It seems that things haven't changed much in a couple thousand years he says. When we knock on doors, a lot of people don't give us a chance to talk. They just say no thanks before we say anything and shut the door. Others are a little rude, "can't you read the sign on the door that says no solicitation?" We didn't think we were soliciting. Some folks won't even answer the door."

"Some places have locked front gates, and you have to ask to be let in. What are they afraid of? "We are not selling anything, and we don't ask for any money. We just want people to know about Jesus and what an incredible world he saw as possible. He believed if we followed his life teachings people could live happier. It is a simple message, be kind, act justly, be generous and treat everyone as if they were your best friend. We just don't get it Ian. Most people think we have some ulterior motive when we visit. They seem very impatient and disinterested."

“That must be very disappointing,” I replied.

“Well, it is kind of” Simon said. “But Jesus knew what kind of reception we might get. When he began preaching in his hometown people resented him. They thought he was a show off, a bit of a know it all. They shut their doors on him then and ran him out of town.”

“Jesus told us that we might expect the same, so we are not really surprised. But pastor Ian you are right, it is disappointing. But we will just keep on going and do our best. We believe in Jesus’ message so we will keep trying. If our car breaks down, we will try and hitch a ride or walk if we have to. That is how much we believe.”

“I really admire your courage and commitment,” I said. I don’t know many people who would be prepared to spend their lives travelling around the country talking about Jesus’ love, and trying to tell them their lives could be better if they followed Jesus. That is a hard sell.”

“Ian, you are a church guy, you believe in Jesus, and we assume you preach about that,” said John. Do you have any words of advice for us?”

“Words of Advice?” “Well, I think a lot of folks are very cynical about the healing power of Jesus’ love. And even more, they question if there is a God at all.”

“How can that possibly be true? Simon asked me.”

“Guys I think it is a perception problem, and a huge misunderstanding of what we expect of God, and how we see Jesus in the world today.”

“Too many people question their faith because they have been told that God is supposed to solve all of our present-day calamities. They question God because they understand God is to undue all the harm in the world; solve world hunger, intervein in wars and bring peace, solve the climate crises and so on. They don’t see God as being the one constant in helping us through a crisis. They think God is responsible for disaster and they think God judges people, so they don’t believe.”

“I think it is the same with Jesus. People read the Gospel stories and take them at face value. If Jesus healed a blind man, brought someone back from death, and if Jesus is still alive, how come he can’t do that for me people wonder? I think too many folks expect they are just wasting their time if they listen to you. I expect many folks don’t come to our church, or any church for the same reason.”

“So, what do you think we should say to people Ian?” they both said simultaneously.

I replied, “Well Jesus told you that you yourselves are the message, right?”

“Yes,” John said.

“OK, so when someone does answer, introduce yourselves, but I might leave out the part about you being disciples. Folks might misunderstand your intent. After all, you are disciples just because of what you do.”

“I might start by saying, we are just travelling through your neighbourhood and want to say hi. We don’t have anything to sell, we are not doing any kind of a survey

and we are not asking for any money. We are not begging for anything. We are not going to ask any questions about your household and make any notes. We are not hired by any political organization or any church. We won't call again, and we are not leaving any brochures."

"We just want you to know that you are loved. Whenever you feel tired, lonely or depressed, try to remember that there is a God, a creator, a Holy Presence that offers comfort and reassurance. Even in our darkest moments when all seems to be lost, God, however named, will embrace you and can make you whole again. You just have to invite God in."

"And the man called Jesus, well he is most definitely alive. He is present in everyone who honours their friends and neighbour, looks after their family, and is kind and generous as much as they can be. Jesus lives hoping more people will follow him to speak up for injustice. He hopes we will continue to grow in our tolerance for everyone and anyone who is different from you and I in some way. He hopes we will show compassion to anyone who needs it. That is how Jesus heals."

"And guys, I think I would leave it there. I would just smile and be on your way thanking the person for their time and wishing them a pleasant day."

"But remember one, thing I say, "and its important." "Remember Jesus advice about shrugging your shoulders and walking away when you are not being listened to?" Well, that is going to still happen often. Don't take offense, that can't be helped. Just keep going as best you can and know that your ministry is blessed."

"And drop in to see me again sometime, or better yet, come and join us for worship. I think you will find our Community of Faith believe in your message and would love to meet you."

They drove off heading to West Kelowna with a full tank of gas courtesy of our Benevolent Fund. So just a heads up that you might get a visit. Thanks for listening this morning, Amen