9-27-2020 Sermon “You Are the Equipment”

 So this is a BIG day, right? I mean, we’ve been looking forward to this day for quite some time. I know I’ve planned for this day, thought a lot about this day, about this service, about this message. I don’t know how you all have prepared for this day - did you buy new clothes? Are you doing something special for today, like going to a favorite restaurant or something? I know what I’m doing - after worship is done I’m going to get some lunch, settle in on the couch to watch the Formula 1 race I recorded on ESPN this morning, and fix a drink in a BIG glass. A big glass of chocolate milk, I mean. What else would you drink on September 27th? It’s National Chocolate Milk Day!

 Honestly, chocolate milk aside, this truly IS a big day in the life of the church and especially in the lives of these eight young people who have completed their confirmation journeys and are ready to become professing members of Church of the Master today. Beginning nearly a year ago, in October of 2019, these young women and men began their studies of the Christian faith and of the United Methodist Church as a cohort of would-be disciples. Now, it wasn’t their first inkling of the faith - they already had a strong foundation from their time in Children’s Ministry here. But Confirmation builds on that foundation, adding structure and systems and context, so that at the end, each of these young people are able to share where their faith is at this point in time. And each of them will share those statements of belief, those credos, with us today as they are introduced to all of you. And like all of events of this nature, these statements of belief will be like photographs - a snapshot of what was the case at a point in time. And in time, just as a photo fades or the contents become dated, so too will the faith statements that they have written. Life happens. The faith journey is not a merry-go-round ride that always brings you right back to the same point. So a week from now, or a month, or a year something will happen - you’ll read something, you’ll hear something, you’ll meet someone - and as a result some aspect of your faith will be impacted, it will change. And what you have written on that page to read today will need to be updated. And that’s okay - that’s how it’s supposed to work. Your faith will grow and it will change. Or at least it should. I read once where a wise man said of our faith journeys, “If the you of 10 years ago doesn’t think the you of today is a heretic, then your faith isn’t growing, it’s dying…or worse yet, dead already.” Your faith is a living thing. Lean into it, don’t let it die.

 You are joining a faith tradition that we call apostolic, meaning it can be traced all the way back to the twelve apostles. But what is an apostle? Well, we start as a disciple, which means one who follows. Jesus called 12 disciples, 12 people whom he invited to “follow” him, to learn from him, to witness what he did, to literally follow him where he went in order to do what he did. He did this in order that the teachings that he shared, the work that he did would go on after he was gone. In our passage today, we have an example of how Jesus intended that to happen. In preparing for them to test the waters on their own in nearby cities and towns, He gave the disciples instructions on where they were to go, what they would need for the journey, and what they should and should not do. “Don’t think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. **You** are the equipment.”

 Other gospel accounts of this story are more specific that they shouldn’t bring an extra shirt, their walking sticks, a money pouch or anything else. Mark, as he usually does, keeps it simple. Bring nothing - **you** are all you need. You are the equipment. And he tells them not to look for Holiday Inns or Motel 6s along the way, to stay in the homes of the people in the towns and eat what they provide for you - hospitality is important here, being present with the people is important. And if you’re not treated with hospitality, don’t make a scene, just shake the dust of that place off your feet and move on to the next place. And with those instructions they go, and it says, *“They preached with joyful urgency that life can be different; right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies and healing their spirits.”*

 So, in this passage, these disciples who have seen much of what Jesus has done as his ministry has taken them around the country, and who, honestly, didn’t always get it like we think they should, these 12 disciples are sent out two by two, like animals boarding an ark perhaps, they are sent to be Jesus’ hands and feet in the world. So…while a disciple is one who follows, an apostle, then, is one who is sent.

 But our passage doesn’t refer to them as apostles yet, that only comes for the Twelve after the crucifixion and resurrection. Until then they continue to follow even as they have also been sent. And that’s kind of what it’s like for us, isn’t it? We are disciples, we are followers of Jesus Christ, who sometimes, like the originals, don’t always get it. At the same time, we’re sent, we’re apostles, sent to take the good news of Jesus Christ out into the world, “preaching with joyful urgency that life can be different.”

 So, to all of you who, like disciples who became apostles are now confirmands becoming church members, how will life be different on the other side of these vows for you? Short of you posting it on social media, putting a sign in your yard, or handing out copies of your confirmation certificate, how will people recognize a difference in you?

 Here’s a couple of thoughts for you to consider. As a professing member of the church you now have the right to vote on issues that come before the congregation at our church conference - items that have to be approved by the congregation. If you’re going to vote on something that literally effects other peoples’ lives and ministry, don’t you think it’s important that you understand what’s at stake in that vote, that you understand the issues? You also, as a professing member of the congregation are eligible to hold positions of authority within the church for which you are called or qualified. So, don’t you think maybe you should begin to understand what are your gifts for ministry in order to serve according to the way God gifted you, so that you can go where Jesus sends you in service and ministry? In these ways, your membership in the church is equal, having the same rights and responsibilities, as that of your parents and others who have made the decision to be a member of the church. One other way in which you are an equal as a member of the church is that you will each have your own member number, and your giving to the mission and ministry of the church will now be counted separately from that of your parents. So, in addition to a nice collection of certificates for completing confirmation and becoming a member of the church, you can also look forward to receiving your own offering envelopes in order to support the mission and ministry of your church.

 But here’s the really important part about how things change; people will look at you differently now. Their expectations of you will change. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he says that *“when he was a child he spoke like a child, reasoned like a child, and thought like a child, but that as adult he put an end to childish things.”* (1 Cor. 13:11 CEB) That same idea holds true for you - confirmation means your faith is no longer a child-like faith and your response to your faith should not be either. Like those disciples in our passage today who, in the power of the Holy Spirit and under the authority of Jesus cast out demons and healed the sick, when you take the baptism and membership vows for yourself, promising to “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin,” people are going to expect that you to mean it and that you’re not just saying it. When you say before God and your family that you “accept the freedom and power that God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves,” if that doesn’t make you live your life differently, then nothing will. It won’t be easy, and there will be times when you will challenged, and conflicted, and will fall flat on your face. We all do. There will be times when, like Peter in our passage from last week, when you will step out of the boat and sink like a rock. Believe me, I know. When I first discerned a call into ministry, there were people, both friends and family, who looked at me like I had grown two heads - “YOU are going to be a pastor? Are you kidding me? I KNOW you - I’ve SEEN what you’ve done! YOU are going to be a pastor?” And admittedly, there are times when I don’t seem and don’t feel very pastor-like. If I whack my thumb with a hammer or something like that, I hate to admit it, but I sound more like a sailor than a pastor! Hopefully, those times are fewer and farther between, but the point is that our faith is a journey of a lifetime, and we are always called to grow in our faith by living into the love of God that is ours even when we don’t feel or act particularly loving or lovable.

 How you **live** your life will be the greatest testimony as to how you have allowed the presence of God in you to shape your life. If you are mean to the “weird” kids in school, if you talk back to your parents or other adults, if you judge or put down others who are different than you, then is there any proof that you even go to a church, let alone belong? There’s a song in one of our hymnals that says “They will know we are Christians by our love.” Note, it doesn’t say they’ll know we are Christians by our certificates, or by how many Bible verses we know, or by how often we go to Youth group, or church, or anything else.

It’s about love. Remember the lessons we had about grace? Remember the idea of prevenient grace? Prevenient grace is that grace, that love of God that loved you and sought to be in relationship with you even before you had ever heard of God. Prevenient grace is that seed of God that is planted within you and that seeks to know God just as God seeks to know you - it’s *like* seeking *like*. That’s how much God loves you - so much that God has sought you out, guided your journey, brought you here, taught you the basics of our faith through Bible stories, and VBS, and M&Ms, and Sunday School, all to get you to the point where you can stand up here today and speak publicly about how you love God. It’s always about love. And so even as your faith journey continues after this day, even as you continue to be disciples following the way of Jesus, you are also apostles who are sent into the world of your household, your family, your neighborhood, your school, to be the the presence of God in the world, to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness and reject the evil powers of this world. And sometimes you’re going to mess that up. So you repent, you start over in the never-ending grace of God and you accept again the freedom and power God gave you to resist evil, injustice and oppression however and wherever you see it - even in yourself. And sometimes you’ll mess up again - metaphorically whacking your thumb with a hammer. And you repent, and you start over again. And as you follow Jesus you’re sent by Jesus. **You,** you are the equipment that God needs in the world today. God has called **you**, as the book of Esther tells us, for a time such as this. Each one of you is gifted by God in unique ways, that you might be the presence of God in unique ways. Bev and I have been blessed to see that uniqueness all through this journey. And all of us gathered here today, physically and virtually, lift you up in joy and in prayer.

 So, on this big day I salute you. In fact, I lift my chocolate milk to you and welcome you as you join this community of disciples and apostles as we all seek to travel together further along the road of faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, I lift my chocolate milk to you this day!

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Keep this SHORT

Being a “tool” - not being aware that we’re being used by someone else for their purposes - you can be the equipment without being a tool

Address this largely to confirmands

BAPTISMAL VOWS

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:

 Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,

 reject the evil powers of this world,

 and repent of your sin?

 **I do.**

 Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you

 to resist evil, injustice, and oppression

 in whatever forms they present themselves?

 **I do.**

Your role might be to help a person move their faith journey from a -5 to a -3, that’s not unimportant, and isn’t that better than being the reason they move from a -5 to a -7?

 **Sermon Title | You Are the Equipment**

**Scripture** | Mark 6:7-13 The Message (you are the equipment)

**Desired Outcome** | Congregants will recognize the ways God prepares each of us for the work of creating new places for new people.

**Reflection Question** | With whom are you collaborating?

**Worship Promo for Week 5 that is in worship folder already**

Creating new places for new people is a collaborative adventure. Each of us has a role. We may wonder if we have what it takes, but we don’t go it alone. Working together, God gives us what we need for the task. Who are your partners in ministry? How are you using the resources God provides? With whom are you collaborating? How do you persevere when you encounter resistance?

**Sermon Building Key Points**

• We are the heirs to the disciples receiving these instructions.

• We are meant to be sharing God’s word and actions in God’s name together – alongside one another.

• Jesus discouraged the disciples from taking things that would provide them shelter at night. By relying on the hospitality of others, the disciples created a space for their hosts to offer grace, too. Sometimes our own actions become means of grace for others.

• If we hesitate to start a new thing, encounter a new person or explore a new place because we don’t feel adequately prepared, we are likely never to take the first step.

• We, like the disciples, are equipped by knowledge, experience, faith and having seen Christ move in our lives and in the world. [One of those places is in the process of Confirmation and then moving into membership in the church]

• Encountering rejection or discomfort is to be expected in many endeavors. It does not mean that our work for God should stop or slow down.

• There is a significant difference between announcing something generally and sharing an invitation with a specific individual. [INFORMATION VS INVITATION]

• If we concentrate too much on eternal life, we forget that we are invited to be participants in the kin-dom of God here and now.

• We are the spiritual descendants of the 12 disciples (chosen by Jesus), of the apostle Paul (the great evangelist) and of Christ himself – called to proclaim and live out the Good News in every nook and cranny of God’s world.

**Scripture Reading**  Mark 6:7-13 (MSG)

Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. **He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition.** **[JUST LIKE IT SAYS IN OUR MEMBERSHIP VOWS]**

He sent them off with these instructions:

“Don’t think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. *You* are the equipment. No special appeals for funds. Keep it simple.

“And no luxury inns. Get a modest place and be content there until you leave.

“If you’re not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Don’t make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way.”

Then they were on the road. **They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different;[HOW WILL YOUR LIFE BE DIFFERENT NOW?]** right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, [and] healing their spirits.

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From [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org) accessed 9/21/20

From 7-5-15

Commentary on Mark 6:1-13

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This Sunday’s pairing of Mark 6:1-6 and 6:7-13 kindles the preacher’s imagination.

The first passage -- “Where did this man get all this?” (6:2) -- closes a section that began with Mark 4:35-41: “Who then is this?” (4:41). Likewise, 6:12 (“So they went out”) opens a door that isn’t shut until 6:30 (“The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught”). What happens when the interpreter listens only to the juxtaposition of Jesus’ return to his hometown with his sending of the twelve? We may hear each story rhyme with its mate.

**1. The mission of the twelve parallels Jesus’ own mission.** In Mark 3:13-15 Jesus assembled the twelve to extend his ministry of preaching and exorcism (1:21-28; 3:7-12). That extension occurs in 6:12-13, after Mark’s made it clear that “his disciples [have] followed him” (6:1). At 6:7a Jesus takes the initiative: “*he* called the twelve and began to send them out” in pairs (perhaps for safety and corroboration: Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; Acts 13:2-3). Their authority derives from Jesus’ power over unclean spirits (v. 7b). The implications for Mark’s listeners should be clear. **Jesus’ disciples are not passive beneficiaries of their teacher; he gives them a mandate to witness and to heal, replicating his own public ministry (cf. 1:14-15; 6:5)**. **Jesus’ adherents are not self-authorizing; they receive orders from their commander and can execute them because he has given them *exousia* -- authoritative power -- to do so. [the same orders you receive and agree to in claiming your vows - to resist evil, injustice, etc., the same authoritative power you received in your baptism]**

**2. The equipment for such ministry appears astonishingly meager.** Some first-century street preachers carried at least a pair of shirts, a staff, and a beggar’s bag. In Mark 6:8-9 the twelve are forbidden the bag and change of tunics; they must live hand-to-mouth while on the road. In a way their paltry resources echo Jesus’s own, which so astound his listeners in Galilee. This hometown boy is only a *tekton*: a carpenter or stonemason (6:3a). (Celsus, Christianity’s second-century critic, mocked the religion’s founding by a blue-collar worker.) “Where did this man get all this” power to teach and to heal (6:2)? To scoff at the disciples’ -- and our own -- equipment for ministry is to take offense just as those in the synagogue did: literally, “they stumbled over him” (6:3b; cf. 4:14). Later, the twelve will be perplexed by the magnitude of human need compared with their paltry resources; yet, with our master’s blessing, it’s amazing how much you can do with so little (6:35-44).

**3. Offers of ministry can be accepted or refused**, and we see both responses in these twinned tales. **Empowered by Jesus, traveling disciples cast out demons, anointed many and cured the sick (Mark 6:13; cf. James 5:14; Revelation 3:18). Even in hostile environs, Jesus laid his hands on a few sick and cured them (Mark 6:5b). Yet among his own kin he was dishonored, and that rejection short-circuited his ability to do a mighty deed among them (6:4-5a). So, too, for his disciples (6:11). Shaking dust off the feet appears to have been a prophetic demonstration: from those who repudiate the kingdom’s herald, nothing should be received -- not even their dirt (see Nehemiah 5:13; Acts 13:51). No one, neither the Christ nor his followers, can ram the gospel down anyone’s throat. If people repent -- turn their minds Godward -- the conditions for healing are satisfied (Mark 6:13). If they refuse to entrust themselves to the good news, delivered by unlikely agents, then Jesus can do little but marvel at their faithlessness (6:6a). Those who expect nothing from Jesus are not disappointed (6:5b).**

**4. Rejecting Jesus and his faithful emissaries isolates; welcoming them creates community.** It’s easy to miss, but this pair of stories in Mark illumines the social consequences of faith or unbelief in the good news. The aphorism about the prophet honored everywhere but at home recalls the saying in Mark 2:17b: Jesus calls, not the familiar righteous, but rather alien sinners. More than any other Evangelist (see Matthew 13:57b; Luke 4:24; John 4:44), Mark highlights the poignancy in 6:4: God’s prophet is dishonored in homeland, among kin, and in his own house. The last item is an explicit link with 3:25-27: the divided house, exemplified by Jesus’ own family who think him mad (3:21, 31-32). Another hint of division within Jesus’ family may underlie his description as “the son of Mary” (6:3). Unlike Matthew (1:16-24), Luke (3:24; 4:22), and John (1:45; 6:42), nowhere in Mark is Jesus called “the son of Joseph.” Does Mark 6 imply that had Joseph died? If Jesus was the eldest son of a widowed mother, then abdication of her support while he practiced itinerant ministry would have been scandalous, though consistent with his teaching elsewhere (Mark 10:29-30). Rejected at home in the synagogue (where Jews assemble for prayer: 1:21), Jesus directs his emissaries -- those “appointed to be with him” (3:14) -- to outsiders in surrounding villages (6:6b). For shelter Jesus’ deputies are instructed to stay in one house until leaving it for another (6:10), dependent on the kindness of strangers. It is a notable feature of early Christianity that so many of its adherents, ostracized by their kin (Mark 13:12; John 9:18-23), found support among surrogate families in house-churches (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2).

Mark has braided the two stories in 6:1-13 with common themes. Rather than cataloguing them, as I have done here, the Evangelist shows the attentive preacher how these tales may be twisted for today’s listeners. After days at sea and on the road Jesus astounds his hometown (Mark 6:1-2). Familiarity breeds contempt (6:3). Jesus expects that (6:4) but cannot do a thing for them (6:5a) save, incidentally, heal a few sick folk (6:5b). While such tales usually culminate in an audience’s astonishment (1:27; 2:12; 4:41; 5:20b; 5:42), now Jesus is the one flabbergasted -- by an un-faith so impenetrable (6:6a). Rejection catalyzes fresh ministry (6:6b-7) by empty-pocketed dimwits (4:13, 35-41; 5:31; 6:8-11) who get the job done (6:12-13). In Mark there’s no stopping the good news (13:10) -- but no telling how it breaks through (16:1-8).

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July 8, 2012

Commentary on Mark 6:1-13

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*Introduction*

Before Mark reports John the Baptist's death, the only story in which Jesus is not the primary subject (6:14-29), Mark tells the story of Jesus' hometown rejection.

*Rejection at Home (Mark 6:1-6)*

For the first time in Mark's story, Jesus entered his hometown synagogue.  [Compare the parallel account in Luke (cf. Luke 4:16-30), which occurs at the opening of Jesus' public ministry].  His successful activity in neighboring synagogues, like Capernaum (e.g., 1:21-27), would have led readers to expect positive results here as well.  Also, the previous healing occurred in the home of a neighboring synagogue leader (cf. 5:35-43).  These positive results would not continue here.

The audience's "astonishment" (*exeplessonto*) at Jesus' "wisdom" (*sophia*) -- perhaps a reference to his parables, as some scholars suggest -- would remind readers of the first synagogue appearance in which the spectators were "astounded" because "he was teaching them as one with authority unlike the scribes" (1:22).

On this occasion, however, the amazement immediately turned negative as the crowd vocalized a series of questions that led them to the issue of Jesus' own origins.  And, they -- hometown folk -- seemed to know all too well from where he came.  If anyone had the right to question Jesus' origins, it should be those who knew him best.  Their description of him as "the carpenter," "the son of Mary," ignored any mention of a father figure.

So, they know a lot about his family.  This information would be a direct insult on Jesus' character, his honor, in first century culture, hinting at one who was conceived illegitimately.  This type of history, with a fatherless lineage, would be "scandalous" to them (*skandalidzo* is translated as "took offense" at 6:3).  Unlike Matthew and Luke who cleaned it up, Mark did not alter the tradition and include a father (cf. Matthew 13:53-58; Luke 4:16-30).  Rather, the tension between Jesus and his family or hometown was an on-going sub-plot of the story (cf. 3:20-21).

Despite the hometown's assessment, Jesus provided an alternative self-designation:  "prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown" (6:4).  By referring to himself as a "prophet," he associated himself with a long line of counter-cultural figures within Israel. In the Gospel of Mark, others would also view him in this way (cf. 6:15; 8:28).

In an honor/shame society, "prophets" would have received honor (cf. 11:32).  But the traditional wisdom of the age was that this occurred generally in places in which prophets were less familiar.  Indeed, as Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh stress about the cultural mores in antiquity, "honor was a limited good.  If someone gained, someone else lost.  To be recognized as a 'prophet' in one's own town meant that honor due to other persons and other families was diminished.  Claims to more than one's appointed (at birth) share of honor thus threatened others and would eventually trigger attempts to cut the claimant down to size."1 This was the issue at stake.

Their reaction seemed to surprise Jesus.  Such "faith," or the lack thereof (*apistian*, "unbelief" in 6:6), amazes even Jesus!  Furthermore, the absence of faith challenged Jesus' ability to perform healing miracles.  At first, the text indicated that he *could not do* anything there (6:5); then, the author corrected himself by adding an exception clause.

On the one hand, it was clear that Jesus' healing authority was intimately interrelated with the faith of others (cf. 5:34, 36).  On the other hand, Jesus could overcome the absence of faith when he desired to do so.  Throughout the story, Mark promoted faith as a critical element in the healing mission of Jesus.  But faith was not *essential*.  Faith was not a necessary condition in any absolute sense.  God's freedom cannot be limited in that way.  The end of this passage provided an explicit example of this perspective.  [The language hinting at Jesus' *inability* due to lack of faith was apparently too difficult for Matthew who altered these words to emphasize Jesus' volition: Jesus "*did* not do" (Matthew 13:58).]

*The Disciples' Mission (Mark 6:7-13)*

The rejection at Jesus' hometown synagogue did not hinder the mission for long.  In fact, it may have given impetus to the commissioning of the twelve for their first assignment.  This was why Jesus had chosen "twelve" in chapter 3.  Since that point, they were preparing for their own mission.  In chapter 4, Jesus taught about the nature of God's reign, providing private instruction for them.  In chapter 5, Jesus performed liberating acts for them to witness.  Finally, just before he sent them out, the mission experienced unexpected rejection, as a signal of what was to be expected in their work in the movement (see verse 11).

Differences in the Gospel accounts may simply have reflected the various missionary strategies in early Christianity.  For example, *only* in Mark did Jesus command the disciples to take a staff and wear sandals.  This may imply the length of their journey.   Dependence on hosts would be important in each Gospel strategy, but in the Markan missionary plan the disciples were more prepared.  Also, there are two other significant features in Mark which should be highlighted.

**First, they were to continue the Jesus movement in *households*.  This was not unanticipated, in light of Jesus' own successful activity in the homes surrounding Galilee. In this narrative, Jesus' message and activity in the synagogues had been growing less impressive as the story went on, including the latest rejection in 6:1-6.  Synagogues, with established religious traditions and authorities, were not always susceptible to new ideas and activities that may have represented a new move of God!**

**So, Jesus prepared his disciples for potential rejection.  Wherever rejection existed, so would judgment: "shake off the dust that is on your feet" (6:11).** [*The Didache* suggested that a false prophet would be one who stayed longer than two days (11.4).]  Yet, according to this account, their mission was successful (6:12-13).  The disciples, clueless in several earlier stories, apparently understood enough to carry out this mission effectively.

Second, while continuing Jesus' message of "repentance" (*metanoein*), their use of "oil" was distinctive.  Such a mediating "medicine" was not anticipated from chapter 3.  No provisions of this kind were mentioned in Jesus' earlier words.  Since Matthew and Luke omitted the reference, its use may actually have reflected a later practice in the Markan community.  But it was a common custom that was known in the wider culture (cf. Luke 10:34) and utilized in some circles of early Christianity (cf. James 5:14).

1*Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Fortress Press, 2002), 212.

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July 5, 2009

Commentary on Mark 6:1-13

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This is one of those instances where the lectionary disturbs the narrative flow of Mark's gospel.

Verses 1-6 of chapter 6 are really a self-contained unit, but who wants to end on that challenging verse 6? So we get verses 7-13 added on, and the preacher can choose to move to these more positive admonitions related to the sending of the disciples. We don't hear the rest of this story, however, until two weeks later in the lectionary when the return of the disciples is narrated in Mark 6:30.

I will treat these units separately, but I will also suggest how they may be related.

The reason why the people of Nazareth reject Jesus in Mark 6:1-6 has never been entirely clear to me. I am more familiar with instances where a small town celebrates, even exaggerates, the success stories of locals who have made it big.

The text suggests an initial positive reception, but somewhere in verses 2-3 everything changes. Why might this be?

* Did they wonder if Jesus was 'crazy smart,' and then decide that he was just crazy? Earlier in Mark 3:21, Jesus' own family had come to get him because they thought he had "gone out of his mind."
* In Mark 6:2, the people asked, "Where did this man get all this?" Did they decide, like the scribes had in Mark 3:22, that he got it all from a demonic source? (This makes for a nice connection with the earlier, similar synagogue scene in Mark 1:21-27 where the question about Jesus' authority was first raised.)
* In a social system where status was understood as fixed (i.e., your status at birth defined who you would always be) and honor/shame considerations were important, did they simply regard it as impossible for Jesus to amount to anything? The people of Nazareth indicate this negative perception when they identify Jesus as a "carpenter" (i.e., a low-status manual laborer) and as the "son of Mary" (i.e., hinting at a questionable fatherhood).

In its breezy style, Eugene Peterson's translation in *The Message* probably gets it right.1  Because people think they know who Jesus is, they end up asking disdainfully, "Who does he think he is?"

The identity of Jesus is a consistent issue in Mark. In the gospel, we hear the opinions of rulers, religious authorities, crowds, disciples, and family members. For the author of Mark, the important question keeps coming around to "who do you -- the reader -- say that Jesus is?" And if you do honor Jesus as a prophet (or more than a prophet), who does that make you? Does it mean new allegiances that supersede traditional country and family values? As you answer those questions, Mark is leading you into a confession of faith.

But what about Jesus' inability to perform miracles? Apparently it caused Jesus to wonder too! A couple things to note:

* The problem is not a matter of whether they have enough faith but that they have no faith.
* Elsewhere in Mark, a person's faith is not necessarily tied to the success of a miracle. Sometimes faith is not mentioned at all. Sometimes the faith of the restored one's friends or family is noted, or, as in Mark 9:24. Sometimes it's a matter of "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Ultimately, what didn't happen in Nazareth is not much of a surprise. A miracle is not just an event but it is an interpreted event. If Jesus is not regarded to be capable of healing, any healing that does happen won't be attributed to him. So, there is nothing here to see. Move along, move along...

**We move on to Mark 6:7-13. The sending of the twelve does not have an encouraging setup in the gospel. We've only seen the disciples a few times in the immediately previous chapters:**

* **In Mark 4, they fail to understand Jesus' parables and need explanations.**
* **At the end of Mark 4, Jesus charges them of being fearful and lacking faith when he stills the storm, and they wonder, "Who then is this?"**
* **In a cameo role in Mark 5, they question Jesus for wondering who touched him in the crowd.**

**Now, Jesus sends them forth to preach repentance, heal the sick, and cast out demons.**

How does this preach today? I have heard plenty of sermons on how God doesn't necessarily choose the qualified but qualifies the chosen. If you want evidence, this text is proof. Maybe someone needs to hear that kind of encouragement. However, I'm not sure how good of a sermon it will make or how much Gospel it actually is.

What's harder to preach is the business about all the things that are not supposed to be taken "for the way" (Mark 6:8). Jesus describes an itinerant ministry where the evangelists live solely on the kindness of strangers, and on faith that Jesus knows what he is talking about.

Times and cultures change, of course, and I'm not advocating this practice as the best way to spread the Gospel today. Still, it should give us some pause as many of us worship in well-appointed sanctuaries and live with salaries, pensions, and any number of shoes and extra clothes. The text is not intended to be a scolding, however, and isn't even the only model for ministry. (Did you note that after being rejected in Nazareth, Jesus forgot to shake off the dust from his sandals!)

**Would you agree that we are living in a world that is more and more characterized by unbelief?**

**If so, doesn't it feel as if we are living in a Nazareth-world -- a culture that is, at best, disinterested in Jesus?**

**If so, isn't it utter folly to think we can change anything by preaching Christ?**

**In fact, isn't any Christian whose life has been transformed by Christ living defenseless in a world where security and status are calculated commodities?**

**We do have one thing those disciples did not, and it makes all the difference. We have experienced the faithfulness of God in Jesus crucified and risen. So, we may marvel at the unbelief around us, but still we go forth, proclaiming and practicing our faith in Christ.**

1Peterson's translation of Mark 6:1-6 reads: He left there and returned to his hometown. His disciples came along. On the Sabbath, he gave a lecture in the meeting place. He made a real hit, impressing everyone. "We had no idea he was this good!" they said. "How did he get so wise all of a sudden, get such ability?" But in the next breath they were cutting him down: "He's just a carpenter -- Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers, James, Justus, Jude, and Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?" They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further. Jesus told them, "A prophet has little honor in his hometown, among his relatives, on the streets he played in as a child." Jesus wasn't able to do much of anything there -- he laid hands on a few sick people and healed them, that's all. He couldn't get over their stubbornness. He left and made a circuit of the other villages, teaching.

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