

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF KISSIMMEE, FLORIDA
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“Take Nothing”

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is 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. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

INADEQUATE DISCIPLES

Jesus sent his disciples to proclaim repentance, heal the sick and cast out demons.

But, they seemed woefully inadequate for the task. We’ve only seen the disciples a few times up to this point in the gospel, but their performance seems less than stellar.

- In Mark 4, they fail to understand Jesus' parables and need explanations.
- At the end of Mark 4, Jesus chastises them because they are so fearful and lack faith.
- But, still they are not convinced to trust Jesus. When he stills the storm, they are still frightened and ask, "Who is this guy?"
- In a cameo role in Mark 5, they question Jesus for wondering who touched him in the crowd.

And of course we know the rest of the story, and it doesn’t get any better. We know that these disciples never really “get it” when it comes to Jesus. They vehemently reject what Jesus has to say about suffering and the cross. In their minds the kingdom of God is all about political gain. For them personal sacrifice seems out of the question.

Even toward the end of the gospel it is apparent that they don't really understand who Jesus is or what the kingdom of God is all about.

Sometimes they seem to be on the way to understanding, but they never quite arrive. They vow to follow him always, but their repeated failures are more spectacular than their achievements.

In fact if you were to read the gospel of Mark in one sitting and focus upon the actions of the disciples you would find them to be almost comical.

Yet early on in our story Jesus sends them out on their own. They do not understand Jesus, but apparently mission does not wait on full understanding or proven courage. Flawed as they are, he sends them out.

How can Jesus dare to send these clueless disciples on a mission trip by themselves? How dare they go?

The disciples certainly didn't seem like the right people for the job.

But, Jesus does send them. Jesus sends them to preach repentance, heal the sick, and cast out demons.

And they are able to do it!

Apparently, God doesn't always choose the qualified. God often qualifies the chosen.

NO BAGGAGE ALLOWED

But, in addition to their lack of personal preparation for this mission trip, they also are not prepared in other ways as well.

And this is due primarily to the command of Jesus.

When Jesus sent his disciples on their first mission trip, he ordered them to take nothing ... no food, no money, nothing.

How many times have we done that? How many times have we gone on a trip and taken nothing at all? Let's go on vacation honey, and this time we'll make it spontaneous. Let's take ... nothing.

I don't know about you, but we never do that. Every trip we take is major exercise in packing. Sometimes I have been embarrassed by just how much baggage we take for just a short trip. Can't we go anywhere without being laden down with so much stuff? Apparently we can't.

And that's true in the church as well. We think that our ability to do mission is determined solely by the amount of resources that we have on hand.

And yet Jesus seems to be saying in our lesson for today that his disciples will be known for what they do not take. Excess baggage is not allowed on airplanes or mission trips with Jesus. You have to learn to travel light.

TOO MUCH BAGGAGE IN THE CHURCH

Isn't this the absolute opposite of much modern theology? Many present Jesus as a means for getting what we want.

A pastor told of seeing a billboard outside of town that read, "We've got what you are looking for, come get it." Below was the name of a local church, its location, worship times and website.

That sign is typical of how many approach evangelism in our modern world. We live in a consumer driven society, and the church is not immune to that pressure. We want to find a need and fill it.

And yet Jesus is presented in this passage as what one commentator called the "master of relinquishment." The message is this: "Come follow Jesus and leave things behind. Come follow Jesus and give things up."

I can't tell you the number of meetings I've suffered through in which the primary focus was on our lack of money. Our guiding principle was not asking, "Where would Jesus have us go? And what would Jesus have us do?"

Our guiding principle was saying, "We better be cautious. We might not have enough money to do this. Let's put off doing mission until our bags are fully packed."

If we focus too much on what we don't have then we will never take the journey that Jesus wants us to take. Instead, we will become obsessed with the church building or the fine points of church doctrine.

And we worry less and less about doing mission.

In fact packing adequate provisions for the journey often becomes a poor substitute for even taking the faith journey. If we are always weighing the cost of discipleship, we can just get too weighed down to ever go anywhere!

MISSION REQUIRES RISK

An Episcopal priest was looking to buy a motorcycle. The salesman said, "This baby can go from zero to eighty in no time at all. Nothing can touch you when you're on this baby."

Then the salesman asked, "And what do you do for a living?" When he learned that his customer was a minister his sales pitch changed dramatically.

He said, "Did I tell you that this is a very, very safe motorcycle."

This is the view that many have of what it means to be a Christian. It is to take the safe, conservative path in all circumstances. But, most of the stories about Jesus teach us just the opposite.

Mission requires a willingness to take a risk. Mission requires us to leave home without having our bags fully packed. Mission requires us to trust in God more than we trust in ourselves.

I think that's what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples by requiring them to hit the road without the usual provisions. Jesus wanted to show those first disciples (and us) that mission does not depend upon who we are, what we have or how much we can carry with us.

I am reminded of what Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians. In that passage Paul tells an overly confident congregation that God chose the weak and the foolish (that is us) in order to show that the power is in the message and not in the messengers. (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Some would say that God needs to delegate jobs to us because he has no other choice. He "has no hands but our hands" as the old saying goes.

But, I would suggest that God delegates jobs to us in order to prove that the power comes from above and not from below. God wants people to say, "Wow, if those untrained fishermen from Galilee can preach and teach and heal, God must be in it."

Mission does not depend upon us and what we have. Mission depends upon the call and promise of God. God will give us what we need along the way. Our job is just to go and proclaim the gospel.

The only thing we really need is a walking stick and faith.

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's marvelous expanded translation of the Bible, Jesus puts it this way: "Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment."

HOLY DEPENDENCE

We may not like that, but that's how it works when you're going on a trip for Jesus. We are required to travel light. Depending totally upon God alone keeps us humble.

And it also does something else. It forces us to depend upon others. Notice that since the disciples didn't take adequate provisions for the journey they were required to depend upon the hospitality of the people to whom they preached.

I have become convinced that in order for ministry and mission to happen we must learn to be mutually dependent. We must learn to help each other and care for each other in practical ways. If we cannot do that, if we cannot allow others to serve us even as we serve them, then ministry is not possible.

Many of us are quite willing to let others be dependent upon us, but we are often quite reluctant to accept help from others. All of us find it difficult to let go of our pride and the myth of self-sufficiency.

But, God in Christ has created us for a kind of holy dependence. The Bible tells us that we are the body of Christ. All of us are necessary, but none of us are self-sufficient. (1 Corinthians 12)

HOMETOWN REJECTION

Finally, when Jesus asks us to travel light it's about more than just packing a small suitcase. It's also about leaving our emotional and spiritual baggage behind as well.

In today's lesson Jesus is confronted with a great disappointment. Up until this time he has been very successful in his ministry. These past few weeks we have read about Jesus calming the mighty storm, healing the sick and even raising the dead.

But, now he's back home in Nazareth and guess what? The hometown folks are not impressed. They say, "He's just a carpenter ... Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. What gives him the right to preach to us?"

And that was that. Jesus couldn't do much in Nazareth. Lack of faith held him back. Practically speaking his ministry in Nazareth was an abject failure.

But, notice how Jesus deals with rejection and failure. He moves on.

He doesn't let rejection stop him. Instead Jesus preaches elsewhere, and then sends his disciples on a mission to other places, places that may be more receptive.

And notice that if the disciples run into opposition they are to follow the lead of Jesus. Jesus told them, "If you come to a place that rejects your message and your help, kick the dust off of your feet as a sign of judgment and move on down the road."

Leave that anger and rejection and disappointment by the roadside and move on.

SHAKING OFF THE DUST

Much of my work as a pastoral counselor has been focused on doing just that, helping people to shake off the dust of a disappointing past and move on down the road. If we insist on staying in a past that we cannot change it is not possible to go on a new adventure with Jesus.

Most of us don't realize what a terrible burden the past can be. We lug around old anger, disappointment and guilt like so much excess baggage. We are often unwilling to forgive others or ourselves. Like the ghost of Jacob Marley in Dickens' A Christmas Carol, we forge a chain of regret that we drag around with us ... not in death but in our life.

Jesus says that it's not necessary to do that. We can travel light if we're traveling for Him. He will provide what we need for the journey, and we can leave the regret at home.

We can live what we preach. Repentance is not just something that we commend to others. Repentance can be at the center of our own life.

Most people have the wrong idea when it comes to repentance. Repentance is not about feeling bad and feeling sorry and being bogged down by all that we have done wrong.

Repentance is about being given the power to leave the past behind and go in a different direction.

And the good news is this: Repentance is possible for all of us. We can turn around this very day and go in a new direction.

Jesus tells us, "Shake the dust off your feet and move on."

In other words, do not let the failures of the past continue to cling to your heels. Get on with life, and follow Jesus to the next challenge. Leave Nazareth and go on to Capernaum or wherever God is calling you to go next

I wonder. Are you stuck in Nazareth? Are you letting your past control your future? Jesus tells you, "Forget about it. Shake the dust off your feet and move on."

FREE TO FAIL

A banner at a church meeting read, "You are free to fail." That's sort of a backward way to look at the gospel, but it's true.

If our life is dependent solely upon the grace of God then we don't have to pack the heavy burden of expectations. We are free to fail.

Our hope is not built on results. Our hope is built upon the promise of God's forgiveness. We just need to go where God leads us and trust that God will give us what we need to make the journey.

So many people spend their lives trying to live up to somebody else's expectations, but the gospel simplifies our life. There is only one call that we have to answer, and that is the call of God as revealed in Jesus.

As it was for those first disciples it is for us as well. Job, friends and even family take a back seat when it comes to the call of Christ.

Paul Harvey tells the story of Joe, who was born into a family of Sicilian immigrants, a family who had a 300-year history as fishermen. Joe's dad was a fisherman. His brothers were fishermen.

But Joe was made sick by the smell of raw fish and the motion of a rocking boat. In a family where the only acceptable way to earn a living was by fishing, Joe was a failure.

His dad used to refer to his son as “good for nothing.”

Joe believed his dad. He believed that his attempts at other types of work were an admission of failure, but he just couldn't stand the smell of the fishing business.

But Joe could do one thing well. He was good at baseball.

And eventually that's what he did. Giving up a field where he could not succeed, Joe DiMaggio moved to another field and became one of the great successes of baseball.

Quite often we have to leave the expectations of others in order to fulfill our true calling.

Jesus had to leave his home town because they could not accept who he really was. And he called his disciples to do the same thing.

THE SACRAMENT OF FAILURE

Someone has called this shaking off the dust the Sacrament of Failure. It is an appropriate text for most of us because most of us fail in many ways. Most of us have a lot of dust to shake off.

But, this is also an especially appropriate text for when we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Think about it. Isn't the Lord's Supper really a Sacrament of Failure? After all, it was on the night of his betrayal that Jesus instituted this meal—the night before the “failure” of crucifixion.

This world of ours does not honor failure. It does not praise weakness. It does not reward defeat.

And yet in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we proclaim a faith that was born in failure. It was through the failure of betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion that God brought victory.

It was through the weakness of self-sacrifice that God brought salvation. It was through the failure of death that God brought life.

Our world loves success stories. Yet most of our lives are not about success. Like those first disciples we are filled with misunderstanding and cowardice. More often than not we fail. We lose. We are weak.

But, in this sacrament we learn that failure does not have the last word. In this sacrament there is encouragement for disciples who are discouraged and have lost everything. In this sacrament we learn that there is forgiveness for our betrayal and hope not only for this life but also for the life to come.

This Supper makes it possible for us to shake the dust of failure from our feet and move on toward the next challenge.

It is this sacrament that makes it possible for us to believe that we don't have to stay the way we are.

With the Apostle Paul we can affirm that if any one is in Christ a new creation is possible. The God who created the world can recreate your life.

Come, then, to this table. Bring your failures with you, and then leave them right here on this altar of forgiveness.

Receive this sacrament and be nourished by this heavenly food.

You need not be immobilized by your failures. You can shake the dust off of your feet and move on. I invite you to do that today.

Amen