



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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. And 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.

Sermon by Rev. Kathryn Skoglund, Synod Minister

July 4, 2021

There is a podcast that I listen to from time to time called "I was there too". It focuses on popular movies and tv shows. In each of the episodes the host of the podcast interviews one of the actors in a particular film or series to get stories on what it was like to be part of that experience. The guest will talk about interesting things that happened behind the scenes, relationships between the actors, that sort of thing.

But the host doesn't talk to the lead actors, the main characters of the movie or show. He interviews one of the supporting actors, one of the bit players who sometimes doesn't even have any lines, but who is nevertheless still important to the plot or storyline, or character development of one of the leads.

And sometimes, after listening to an episode of the podcast I will go watch the movie or show and pay special attention to the actor who was interviewed to see how he or she played their particular part, the choices they made for how they reacted to what was happening in a scene, the emotions they felt,

and what their motivation for that choice might be. And I really enjoy doing it because it helps me get a deeper understanding of what's happening in the larger story being told.

So, in today's Gospel, rather than focusing on the first part of the text, with Jesus as the main character, I want to talk about the second half and focus on the supporting cast, the bit players in the scene, or as we more commonly call them, Jesus' disciples.

Now, most of the time in the gospels the disciples are stuck in the background, following Jesus, listening to what he says, pretending they understand what he's talking about, and most of all, marveling at everything he does.

Sometimes they have speaking parts, usually asking questions, or trying to give the right answer to questions Jesus asks them. But generally, these men are content to just serve as part of the scenery to the really important part of the story.

Until today. Today they suddenly get thrown into the spotlight. Today Jesus sends them out as main actors in their own drama. It's like a series spin off where they become the lead characters with their own adventures.

And I have to ask, Jesus was telling them what he had planned for them. How did they feel about what was happening? Were they excited to finally be given their chance to shine? I would guess at some level felt honored that Jesus thought they were capable of the responsibility he was giving them. After all, they spent so much time together he must have thought they were ready for such a big job, weren't they?

Maybe they were nervous. Because, let's face it, Jesus had mixed reviews when it came to his interactions with people in his travels so far. In some places he was a crowd favorite-just before the today's incident he had such a great following that when a woman suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years tried to touch him she had to push through the hoard to even get close. He healed her without even trying. She just touched his cloak and behold, she was healed.

Then he raised the dead daughter of Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue to the joy and amazement of all who saw it, an amazing performance! And yet, when he went home, his neighbors and relatives belittled him just about ran him out of town because of their unbelief. So maybe the disciples were anxious and worried about how they would be received when they went out on their own.

Perhaps they were a little put out-after all, going around, preaching, teaching, and healing people was Jesus' job, wasn't it? How could he expect them to take over? They were just regular guys, with no special training, completely unqualified for the task. Jesus was asking way too much of them.

Or maybe they just felt completely unequipped for the mission he was sending them on. After all, he didn't give them any special training or tools for the task. No money, no food, no support other than one of their fellow disciples. He just said go, do what you can wherever you are, and if it doesn't work out, or the people don't want you there move on to the next place. If I was one of them, it would all feel a little overwhelming to me.

I mean, how would you feel if you were one of his disciples? Which isn't really a rhetorical question, because you are in fact, one of Jesus' disciples, and if you are currently one of the people in one of the many churches without a pastor or interim, you are in the same situation as those disciples in today's text: alone, without a shepherd, being asked to carry on the mission of your congregation on your own, without guidance, or tools, or special training. So, I'm guessing you may be feeling some of the same things the disciples of long ago felt.

There are some of you who are anxious about what will happen. You are worried about the future. You've already been through so much dealing with the COVID virus, will you be able to survive long enough to welcome a new pastor. It's scary to think about.

I know there are some of you who feel overwhelmed thinking about taking care of all the work of the church and you are ill equipped to do what needs to be done. I've heard people say, I'd be comfortable reading a lesson, or even leading the liturgy, but I'd never be able to preach a sermon, or visit someone in the nursing home or hospital. Does that sound familiar to any of you?

I'm sure there are some who are irritated and feeling put out-why should we have to do all of this? It isn't our job. The pastor is supposed to do that. We already have so much on our hands, how can we take on one more thing? I've heard that from a few people I've talked to.

But I've also heard something like this: I really don't know how to do this, but I'm willing to try. I know there are a lot of churches who are in the same boat, and because my church is important to me I want to find a way to help out our people so teach me what to do. Or, and here is one of my favorites: someone said to me "I realized I can be part of the problem or part of the solution, and I want to be part of the solution."

Now going back to the gospel, I imagine that Jesus' disciples felt a whole lot of conflicting emotions. I have no doubt they felt afraid, anxious, angry, confused, overwrought, and overwhelmed. And not just in today's gospel but throughout their time with Jesus. But they also knew that Jesus wasn't going to be with them forever. They knew this because he told them so. He was preparing to have them carry on the mission he started, and they knew that to truly be his disciples, to faithfully follow him, they needed to step out of their supporting role and into the role to which Jesus called them, and because they trusted in him they did what he asked. And through them, the church as we know it was born.

That's how we got to where we are today. And as members of his church Jesus still calls us, his disciples, into this same role: to be his church, carry out his mission, preach and teach, and proclaim the good news.

The script he gives us is simple, and the lines are easy to remember because you've heard them before, and you know them by heart. God loves you. God's loves you with a deep, and strong, and enduring love: a love so deep that Jesus, God's own son, gave his life for you. A love so strong, that nothing will destroy it, not sin, not death, not anything in all of creation. A love so enduring that it will never cease, no matter who we are or what we do, a love that will last beyond the end of time.

Our motivation is clear. Because Jesus came to show us God's love and give us life, we are free to share this love with others so they too will have life and have it abundantly. We are not without the necessary tools: God has equipped us with God's Grace and God's Spirit to help us do the work we need to do in our congregations, our communities and our world.

Whether you are someone in a congregation that currently has a pastor or are one of the people in one of the many congregations that has no pastor or interim you are called into mission, just as those disciples were so long ago. And just as they were, you can embody the role into which you are being called.

I know during these times of short supply of interims and settled call clergy it seems like keeping our churches going must be more complicated than that. And it probably is, or maybe We just make it so. But if we ask ourselves what is the main reason we really exist as a congregation, what is the one thing that we say is most important in our mission as the church, I believe we would say it is to proclaim the good news of God's love, shown to us in Jesus Christ. If that is the answer then we have all we need to fulfill that mission. And if we trust in God, who is truly the most important actor in all of this, if we ask for God's guidance and faithfully keep Christ at the center of all we say and do, then the rest will be directed by God's hand, a God who loves us beyond measure and who will not fail us.