

## Sermon July 7, 2024

### Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On 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! 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. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And 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. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If 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.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

### Building the Kingdom

When Jesus went into the wilderness, he was all alone; there was no one there to help him understand the terrain. He was hungry and frightened in a hostile and unfamiliar land. Perhaps his experiences there, filled with temptation and fear, showed him how important the love and support of a community can be.

So, Jesus quickly gathered together 12 disciples. These men saw something amazing in this itinerant preacher, who proclaimed that God's reign was coming. They believed... they believed so much that they left behind their

jobs, their families, their homes and joined this dynamic movement. They believed so much that they never looked back. And they were not alone. As this small group traveled from village to village, people's lives were changed. Some were healed, some were saved, some were overwhelmed by his preaching... crowds of people dropped what they were doing and joined them. Men and women who were ready to experience God's holy reign.

Of course, not everyone was ready for the difficulties of discipleship. When he returns to his hometown, a place that should have been so familiar and safe... his friends and neighbors are not ready to hear what he has to say. At first they look at him with smiles of pride, but their pride soon turns to anger: "Isn't this Joseph and Mary's son – that carpenter and... well you know what they say about Mary. We've watched him grow up with his brothers and sisters and he comes in here – into our place of worship – and he dares to say these things to us..."

With a sigh, Jesus leaves his hometown and wipes the dust from his feet. And then he expands his mission. He sends out his 12 closest followers. The ones who did not look back with regret. The ones who were excited by the coming reign. The ones who saw changes in their world with excitement! The ones who could go out and spread the good news of God's presence in the world!

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Beloved, we hear today that Jesus sends out his disciples to proclaim that God's reign has arrived. Jesus sends them out and gives them authority over every spirit and every condition that oppresses God's children. Jesus sends them out to everyone – not just the ones who look like them and act like them! Jesus sends them out, knowing that they will face dangers and temptations.

Jesus sends them out!

These blessed disciples disappear two-by-two into the dusty roads before them, and they are empowered to share in the work of Jesus. The peace that they give will be the peace of Christ. No longer staying safe on the sidelines, these followers are now sent out:

- ∞ They are sent out to share peace,
- ∞ They are sent out to share fellowship,
- ∞ They are sent out to cure the sick,
- ∞ They are sent to preach about God's love for each and everyone of God's beloved children
- ∞ They are sent out to proclaim the kingdom of God.

They were sent to live out and practice the faith that they had already claimed. Jesus' own followers – the ones he chose as family - are transformed from bystanders on the side of the road to active participants in the work of God.

Jesus tells them to go empty-handed. These disciples are to carry no money or weapons swords, no food or supplies, no sandals for their feet. They must leave all of the comforts and necessities at home and never look back.

They are armed only with the message that the reign of God has come near. The Kingdom has come. They are to speak these words to those who offer them hospitality and to those who do not. They are to live into God's vision for the world. They are to practice peace, do justice, live the faith. After seeing what they had seen, after witnessing so much pain and so many miraculous moments, these followers were sent out to be doers of the word, to be kingdom carriers.

Beloved, we hear today that Jesus sent the disciples out and we inherit this mission. We are kingdom carriers too. Jesus sends us out to share the peace of Christ, extravagant love and the good news of God's presence on earth.

Sometimes when we are sent out, the people are not ready to hear our words of faith. They wonder who we are: "Isn't that (name names)? How dare they come in here and say these things to us?"

We dare because God's beloved child sends us out! All God's people should pay attention, because this concerns us all. Those sent out aren't a tiny group walking around in bathrobes. Jesus sends out all God's people. It's you and me, Beloved, everyone who will hear the call.

Jesus is asking each of us to continue the message he began 2000 years ago, when he went to his hometown and proclaimed:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This is Christ's mission on earth... the mission we all have inherited. We are the Body of Christ and we are called to embrace one another, just as we are embraced in Christ's body.

And we are not alone; we travel together. Just as the earliest disciples went 2 by 2, we go in twos and threes... we go as a community. And wherever 2 or 3 gather together, we can be sure that Jesus is there too.

And so, take up our staff and go! We go in the company of the Spirit; that same Spirit that Jesus proclaimed thousands of years ago. We go, knowing that we are anointed and blessed and that the Spirit will be with us when we face friends or go out into the world. We are sent out, but we are never alone.

## Invitation to the Table

When Jesus sat at tables and broke bread with tax collectors, lawyers, rich leaders, and poor peasants, he proclaimed that God's gracious love and abiding presence know no bounds. Through these occasions of sharing food, women and men experienced God, and shared in God's Beloved Community. A Community where: all are welcome, worthy, and invited; lives are transformed and empowered; and the fruits of God's gentle justice bloom throughout all Creation.

**All people, including each of us, are invited to share in this sacred meal of celebration, and be strengthened by the presence of God in this place.**

## Prayer of Remembrance

We remember that Jesus fed 5,000 hungry people with five loaves of bread and two fish. At this miraculous meal, there was such an abundance of food that everyone ate until they were full – and there were even twelve baskets of food left over.

**Holy God, we celebrate Your abundant care and solidarity, revealed in this meal.**

We remember that Jesus joined a great banquet with Levi, the despised tax collector. And despite the complaints of some, Jesus welcomed Levi, and invited him to repent and enjoy a fresh beginning at life.

**Holy God, we celebrate Your transforming presence, revealed in this meal.**

We remember that while sharing a meal with Pharisees, Jesus welcomed a woman viewed as an outsider. As the woman anointed his feet with oil, Jesus declared her dignity before everyone at the meal.

**Holy God, we celebrate Your gracious inclusiveness, revealed in this meal.**

At these meals, Jesus, and the women and men disciples resisted the divisions, injustice, and violence of society. They lived out a new – the Beloved Community of God – a place of love, justice, and mutuality. Today

we celebrate these meals and ministries and seek signs of this Community in our midst.

But we also recognize that not all people liked Jesus' ministry. In fact, for some people, it was scandalous. They said, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" Jesus' life became endangered.

When his arrest seemed near, Jesus ate a meal in an upper room with the disciples. As he had done so many times before, he took bread and after having given thanks to You, Holy God, he broke it and gave it to the disciples, this time saying, "Do this to remember me." After the meal he shared wine, gave thanks, and said, "I will not drink from this cup again until I drink it with you in the presence of God."

Jesus was then unjustly killed by the systems of domination of his day.

To some of his frightened disciples it seemed that the bread symbolized his broken body, and the wine his blood. It also seemed like injustice and violence killed Jesus and his ministry. But the resurrection provided a new hope. There were more meals – and more ministries! We thank you, Holy God, that the last supper wasn't the last meal – or the last word!

At an evening meal in Emmaus, Jesus once again ate with the disciples. His execution wasn't the end. His presence and ministry continued in a new way. Jesus once more took bread, and having given thanks to You, Holy God, he broke it and gave it to the disciples, revealing that Your steadfast love is stronger than death – and your ministry, with us, for the sake of your Beloved Community, continues.

The vision of this Beloved Community persisted – and persists today – through the many women and men who seek to be your resurrection community. Despite the divisions, violence, and injustice in the world, God continually brings forth renewed hope for love, justice, and mutuality to and through each of us.

Therefore, Holy God, in the sharing of this bread and wine, we joyfully celebrate the hope-inspiring ministry and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Blessing the Bread and Cup

Gracious God, may this meal, for us, be an "Emmaus meal," where we encounter your presence in the sharing of this food, as the disciples did at their meal in Emmaus.

May the sharing of this food also be a taste of your Beloved Community, Holy God, so we may be strengthened to be your joyful and hopeful disciples. And may we share in your Beloved Community of love, justice, and mutuality with those around us. Amen!

## Blessing

**Holy God, bless each of us, and the meal we will share, so we may be: opened to your abiding presence; nourished by your gracious love; and strengthened by your resurrection power. Amen!**

Come taste and see and know God is present with us here.

