

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 30, 2006
Mark 6:7-13

“Sent”

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

There may be some of you who will think that the Gospel lesson for today is very impractical for modern 21st people. Indeed, some might argue that it has nothing to do with us here this day gathered in worship (or hearing the message on the radio or Internet). But if we look a little more closely at these words, we will see that the Lord has much to say to us as his modern day disciples.

For a theme, we have the words of the text, that Jesus began to send them out two by two and from this sentence we focus on the word, “Sent”. May the Holy Spirit enable us to apply these words to our lives and to see in them the necessity for each of us to be “sent”.

I. What is Needed for the Journey

This account from the Gospel of St. Mark is a shorter version of the sending of the twelve recorded in St. Matthew’s Gospel. Later the Lord would send out 72 for a similar purpose. This was an important part of the Galilean ministry of Jesus and it also served as a training ground for the later work of the apostles. The apostles of course are the central part of this text. And it is interesting that the word Greek word used for the sending is “apostellein” which means “send out” or “send forth” and is in actuality the root word for “apostle” which means, “one who has been sent”.

Not only are they sent but the text continues, “and he gave them authority over unclean spirits”. This was a striking gift from the Lord. If you look at the Gospels, you see again and again references to unclean spirits, to evil spirits, to those possessed by evil spirits. Such a view of life is really foreign to our day and age. Yet as one commentator has put it, it would almost appear that the devil was going all out in his assault on people in a direct confrontation with the Son of God. We don’t speak much today of these things, perhaps that is because the evil spirits are content to exert their influence in more “sophisticated” ways but we need to be reminded of the fact that the struggle is real. As the apostle Paul wrote, “For we struggle not against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual forces of wickedness in high places.”

Now if you are being sent out, you need to be prepared. So what are the twelve to take with them. Not much. Listen to the words of the text: “He charged 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 put on two tunics.” What he is saying is take the clothes you are wearing and nothing else. In modern terms we would say, don’t even pack a spare change of underwear. Besides

this, no money, no food. Just go.

Now if this does not fly in the face of all the preparations that we would make if going on a trip. Think of the last trip you might have made. What did you all pack? What did you take along? What snacks or food did you take? If you were just going to Waukesha or Racine and could take no money along for the journey how would you feel? Now there was a purpose for the Lord's directions here. He was putting the apostles in His care. They would have to be dependent on Him. They would need to see His care for them in the support and care they would receive from others along the way. This was a practical application of the words of the Fourth Petition, "give us this day our daily bread." Provide for us what we need day by day.

And maybe this says more than we can imagine to a time when we over plan everything. It is said if you want to do something you need to plan it. And so the subcommittee plans it, and the committee refines it, and the council changes it, and the voters' approve it, but by then everyone is so tired out by the process that we may have forgotten what the original plan was in the first place.

Jesus sent them. He said "Go!" and they went.

II. Where are You Sent?

And now comes the next part of the instruction: "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." They were to go to a house. They did not set up a meeting in the town square. Nor even did they go to the synagogue. But rather they went to a house. A commentator has said again that the home is the center of the church just as it is of the nation. And so the apostles were sent there. That is where their ministry was to take place. And some would receive them. And some would not. The ones who would reject them would have the dust of their feet shaken off as a testimony. But many would receive them. Many would hear. As the concluding verse of the Gospel relates: "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." The power of the Lord was with them. They preached repentance. They healed many. The mission was a success.

And again, there is a connection here to each of us. When you are sent, where is it to? We have all kinds of excuses for our inaction. It is too far to go. I don't know what to say. Where can I start. How about next door? Or with my co-worker who sits next to me at my job. Or with the stranger on the bus or standing at the corner. Jesus did not send the apostles far away. He sent them into the villages of Galilee. Oh, they would be sent throughout the world in the days to come. As Jesus would say, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all the people." But it starts much closer to home. And this is where it must start with us.

There is a very necessary application we could make here. To put it frankly, the church attendance of this congregation lately stinks. And I do not use that word advisedly. Collectively our worship attendance has not been a pleasing aroma to the Lord. And there may be all kinds of reasons for this, the most likely one you will hear is that it has been too hot. Too hot compared to what? Or people are on vacation. For eight weeks? And just where are the children? Do some people have the attitude that because school is on summer recess, church is as well? No you can do something about this. Look around you. There are lots of people you know who are not here. Quite a few of them may be members of your own family. Encourage them; Admonish them; Remind them—so that we may not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

We are all sent. But we may not have to be sent very far. The mission might be a lot closer than you think.

III. The Grace To Do It.

Now of course, I can hear it now: But how can we do this? Well, of course, we cannot do it by ourselves. But we have the power of the Spirit working through the Word—God's Word. We are loved by God. The Epistle lesson for today has always been thought of as a difficult word from St. Paul—but it is a beautifully powerful word as well. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He chose us in him. His grace has been freely given to us in the One he loves through whom we have redemption through his blood. We have our hope in Christ and through the word of the Gospel by the power of the Spirit who has guaranteed our inheritance we are God's own—to the praise of his glory.

That short summary of the Epistle is a reminder of the fact that we belong to Christ. We have been saved by him. It is his grace that empowers us and it is by his grace that we are sent. You see, it is not dependent on us. Rather it is dependent on Him and on his power. We need take nothing along. He will supply our needs.

Let none hear you idly saying,
there is nothing I can do.
While the souls of men are dying
and the master calls for you
Take the task he gives you gladly
Let his work your pleasure be
Answer quickly when he calls you
Here am I, send me, send me!

In Jesus' Name. Amen.