



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

July 30, 2006
8th Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 6:7-13
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Amos 7:10-15
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 78
Second Lesson: Ephesians 1:3-14
Gospel: Mark 6:7-13

The Church Goes Out

God's people on earth, the church, are a group of people that come to him. It is one of his commands to us, isn't it? In the Gospel-- "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). God invites us to come to him, to spend time with him, to have our hurts soothed and our worries calmed. He did that for the early church. He did that for the disciples when he took them off into quiet places and taught them and taught them by parables. He took them in the Upper Room and he brought them together to him and taught them and taught them and taught them right up until the end. But the church that comes together is not just a church that comes together because already early in their ministry, before they had all their training under their belt and before they really even understood everything that they would finally understand about what the kingdom of God was, he called them together and sent them out two by two. The church that comes together is also the church that goes out. That is just as true today as it was in the days of the apostles.

We have been called by God to come to him, to be nourished by him, to be fed by him, to be protected by him, to be soothed by him, but then he also looks us in the eyes and says, "Okay, now go out." He may not have sent us two by two into the surrounding villages and towns as he did with the apostles in Galilee, but he has called us and sent us out. As we consider what it means that we are the church that goes out, we see that we are also sent by God, and we also have been instructed by God and just like the early church, we can expect to be blessed by God as we go out.

In the series that we have been looking at from the Gospel of Mark, we have seen Jesus in Galilee. We have seen him perform miracles. We have seen him still storms. We have seen him raise the dead. We have seen him be rejected. But we see him continuing always to share the Gospel with people and now, so that more people can hear the Gospel so that they don't just have to wait until he himself gets there, he calls the Twelve to him and sends them out two by two to the surrounding villages. We are told that he gave them authority over evil spirits. You might wonder why "two by two?" It probably goes back to Jewish law that you are probably familiar with from Matthew 18--*that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'* (Matthew 18:16). So you have the two going out and they are testifying as witnesses to repent and turn to God and believe the good news that Jesus is the Savior. In Matthew, the parallel account of this text says that they were to teach people to repent and believe the good news, believe the Gospel that Jesus was the Messiah.

So these guys are quite clearly sent out by God. There is no doubt about it. He calls them together. He looks them in the eye and says, "Okay, you and you, and you and you, and you and you, and you and you, you six groups, you go out. You go village to village. I am going to give you authority to back up your message so that people can see that this is a message that comes from God and not just from your clever imagination, but you go." He sends them out. These guys weren't complete scholars yet. These are guys that still stuck their foot in their mouth all the time. When Jesus ascended they still said, "Are you at this time going to establish the kingdom?" These guys were not know-it-alls about everything. But they did know that they believed Jesus was the Messiah. They did know that people had to turn away from sin or else they would be lost forever. They did know the only answer to that sin is Jesus, so what they did know, they went out as witnesses and shared. They were sent out.

What about us? We might think that this text probably more properly applies to called workers, full-time public ministers. They certainly have been sent by God. God and the doctrine of the call in Holy Scripture tells us that he *gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service* (Ephesians 4:11-12). It certainly applies to them. They are sent by God.

But I think as you go through Scripture and if you read through Scripture closely and you look at what he describes when he describes the whole body of Christ--*you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God* (1 Peter 2:9). That is not just Called Workers. That is not just full-time public ministers. That is all of us. All of us who believe that Jesus lived and died in our place are a chosen nation, a holy people made holy by the blood of Christ. You are a people belonging to God, a royal priesthood, *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God* (1 Peter 2:9-10). God has sent each and every Christian to declare his praises. He has told us to always be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have.

We haven't been sent as directly—go to this village and go to that village—and things like that, but didn't our Psalm give us some direction on who we are sent to? Aren't we sent to our family so that we review together with the generation before us and the generation that comes after us the mighty deeds of God so that people do not forget who God is and what God has done? Isn't that who he is sending us to? Doesn't he send us to always give an answer for the hope that we have for those who don't yet know it? Doesn't he tell us that we are his hands and we are his mouthpiece to encourage those who are troubled, those who are facing difficulty? He has given us the comfort that we ourselves have received from God so that we can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God—that phrase we often use that comes from our Lord. He tells us that he builds us up in the faith so that we can build each other up and encourage one another, so that we can teach one another, so that we can admonish one another. You look at every one of the "one another" passages in God's Word and they are all directed to all Christians and they are all things he has sent us to do.

He has also given us authority over evil spirits—not to cast them out in some miraculous sense like this as a sign, but when you think about it, whenever you go and you are sharing God’s Word or God’s comfort or God’s encouragement with someone, who are you battling against? You are not battling against the person you are speaking with if they don’t believe you. Your fight is not against them. You are battling Satan. Satan is going to want to put up road blocks either to keep you from speaking or to keep them from listening, but our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It is against Satan. Every time that we listen and go out and are sent by God, we are doing battle against Satan for the souls of those God puts us into contact with. That is the simple truth that God lays out before us in Scripture. Each and every day each one of us in various ways or in various forms are going to have opportunities to do battle with Satan as we share the Word that brings life with ourselves, our families, our friends or anyone else we meet. That is what God has sent us to do. And it is there in Scripture. And it is not a burden. It is a privilege, because the greatest thing that we can do is tell someone else who God is and what God has done for them.

The world around us might say, “You don’t talk about religion.” God says, “Talk about me. Tell them what I have done for them, but speak my Word in its truth and purity.” He gave the first apostles when he sent them out in Mark 6 and he gives us some good guiding principles about what to do as we go out and speak these Words. He gave every direct, specific instruction for these Twelve—which I don’t think we have to say applies directly to us, but the general truth that lies behind these instructions I think are good for us to imitate. It says these were his instructions-- *“Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 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”* (Mark 6:8-11).

The instructions—take a staff—that was practical as you walk through those paths to get to those other villages and you go by all these little bushes. You are going to have things in the bushes, snakes or various things, or rough terrain to go over. A staff was practical. Use what is wise to help you in what you are doing. But these other instructions—no bag, no money, no extra tunic, and when you get to a town, stay in the house that welcomes you and in the parallel account it says, “Stay in the house of a worthy person, someone who believes the message” I believe is what it is saying. But then when you stay in one spot, don’t go looking for a different spot so that you can find better accommodations or a better cook or better whatever, better view or whatever the case may be. All these things are really saying to stay focused on what your job is, here are the instructions—stay focused on proclaiming the Law and the Gospel. Don’t let anything distract you from it—like worrying about what you are going to take along or what you are going to have with you. Don’t be worried about how you are going to provide for yourself. Trust God to provide. Don’t take along that money and figure out how you are going to meet every last need that you face. Trust that God will provide for you. Then finally he says that if you are rejected, shake the dust from your feet as a quiet testimony against them that they are condemned because they have rejected the Gospel.

What it means for us I think basically is that when we are sent out by God, we need to learn to trust God to produce the results and not ourselves. Isn't that a hard lesson for us to learn? When you talk with people, like when we have the Friendship Witnessing Workshops and you are asked the question, "What is it that keeps you from talking to other people about God?" A lot of the answers focus on things like fear of saying something wrong or afraid of how I am going to be perceived. They all seem to center on some kind of fear—fear of how it is going to affect me. Isn't fear at its basic level a lack of trust in God? Doesn't God know that what keeps us from going and serving him in the places he puts us is that we don't trust him enough. We don't trust him to produce the results. We think it won't do any good to talk about Christ. We don't trust him in how we will be received. We don't trust him that he will take care of us. We are so worried at looking at ourselves, we forget about looking at God, so we keep our mouths shut and we move on and when God has sent us, we say, "No. There they are. Send them. Send them."

We have heard God's instructions that say, "Put your trust in me." But as sinful human beings, all too often we fall short. But this is God's plan. This is his plan—to work through people like you and I—people that are going to be tempted to doubt God's promises. So to trust God, we need God's help. We have to be built up in his Word ourselves so that we trust his promises and so that his love strengthens us to do more than we could imagine. God will do that. God will strengthen us. God will enable us to not necessarily shake the dust off our feet, but in a gentle loving way, enable us to say to someone who rejects Christ that you feel for them because without God, they don't have eternal life. God is not calling us to be confrontational. God is not calling us to get into someone's face and scream. But he is calling us and instructing us to lovingly proclaim the Gospel and trust him to produce the results.

When you look at what God did through these guys who didn't know all that much and who weren't overly prepared so to speak at this point in time, we are told that, *They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them* (Mark 6:12-13). They used the authority that God gave them. They proclaimed the Word that God told them to do and to their amazement, there were those that repented. There were those that didn't of course, but there were those that listened to this message that came through humble fishermen and tax collectors and whatever occupations they had. Simple men—not scholars, not rabbis, not scribes, not Pharisees, not Sadducees, not the religious leaders of the day, but simple men went out and spoke faithfully the message God gave, and God blessed their efforts.

Trust in God and what he has called us to do, and God will bless us in the ways he sees fit—whether that is true in our individual life or our congregational life. God's blessings await those who serve him faithfully. That is not why we serve. That is just a blessing of his grace. We serve because he loved us first and we want to show our love for him. To be honest, the new self in us can't be contained from sharing God's love in Christ. When that new self is given the nourishment of the Gospel, it is its natural desire and it is its natural action—trust God, go out and know that God will bless us.