

## “Hometown Honor”

Mark 6:1-13

July 9, 2006 - Proper 12, Year B

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

### Mark 6

<sup>1</sup>He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup>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! <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” <sup>5</sup>And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup>And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup>He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup>He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup>but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup>He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup>They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Prayer.

Pastoral ministry has made significant changes over the past two thousand years.

Just in the collective memory of many here at Zion, I have heard you recall fondly the ministers of years past, especially as we have reminisced about pastors of old we are inviting back for our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Clergy come from outside the congregation, appointed by the Bishop, to serve as the pastor of the church. Each are appointed to on a year by year basis, and change is constant. There was a time when most were short time, part time seminary students at Colgate Rochester. Most were young, some just starting a family, all wet behind the ears. There was a time when most were full time and shared with a nearly equally sized sister church in the hamlet of Walworth. Many were older, more experienced, some were even sliding into retirement. And now, this parish is being served by a half-time ordained elder (me), who works full time in a conventional job, much like the rest of you.

Before the memory of even our most senior members, there was a time when most parishes were served by itinerant circuit riding, single, young clergymen. For example, one might be assigned to serve all the churches of western Wayne County. They would travel from church to church on a regular basis, staying in the homes of parishioners, bringing Holy Communion whenever they were present. Dedicated laity, engaged in evangelism and mission, led local churches and oversaw every detail of operations. Leading worship and preaching was left up to local, lay preachers whenever the traveling elder wasn't present. Just about everyone who had the gift of public speaking took their turn behind the pulpit.

Prior to this model of ministry, there was a strict, male dominant, celibate, authoritarian style of parish priest. Authority came through the pope, to bishops, to the clergy and, lastly, to the people. The ordered life was dependent upon the generosity of the people, so clergy often resorted to manipulation to satisfy their need for affluence, using threats of hell and damnation as vital tools to get people to do as they desired. Obviously, this was a system vulnerable to exploitation. Corruption was rampant.

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In the earliest centuries of the Church, there is evidence of clergy – known by the Greek word “presbyters” - being members of the body – known as the “ecclesia” - who were recognized for their gifts of word, sacrament, and order. Others, known as “diakonos,” or deacons, were recognized and ordered to a specific ministry of service – to the poor, needy, disadvantaged, widows and orphans. Members of the ordered life were male and female, married and single, serving at equal status with the members of the body, all linked and sharing a common, single baptism. This evidence is largely scattered throughout the book of Acts, and in other Epistles.

But in the earliest form of Christ-led ministry, we are led back to the second half of our Gospel lesson for this morning. Jesus takes his twelve, single, male disciples, pairs them up into groups of six, and sends them out to engage in the ministry of repentance, casting out demons, anointing the sick with oil, and healing.

His disciples have no credentials other than being claimed and called by Christ. No ordination. No seminary degree. No course of study. No background in church history, doctrine, or polity. Everyone is woefully under-trained, under-prepared, and utterly in over their heads – doing exactly what Jesus asks them to do.

Welcome to the world of discipleship.

To be an effective disciple of Jesus Christ, you don’t need a seminary degree. You don’t need higher education. You don’t need one thing beyond being claimed and called by Christ. That is the only credential necessary. And that, my beloved, is bestowed upon you at your baptism.

You’ve been claimed. You’ve been called. “So what are the implications for us today?” you may ask.

1. All are ministers, to be engaged in ministry, fulfilling the will of Jesus Christ. This is where it is helpful to resurrect Luther’s vision of the priesthood of all believers. In the words of master preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor, she observes

*“To believe in one’s own priesthood is to see the extraordinary dimensions of an ordinary life, to see the hand of God at work in the world and to see one’s own hands as necessary for that work. Whether those hands are diapering an infant, assembling an automobile, or balancing a corporate account, they are God’s hands, claimed by God at baptism for the accomplishment of God’s will on earth.”<sup>1</sup>*

Wow. Let that sink in for a moment.

In our congregation, it means that some of us are called to a ministry of cleaning, stocking, slicing, fixing or building. Others are called to be students, therapists, or teachers. Others are called to be in the ministry of engineering and research. Some are called to the ministry of service, delivery, or hospitality. Others are in the ministry of management and supervision. Still others are in the ministry of art and music. All of us – every last one of us – is called to be a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God has laid claim on your hands. God has developed your mind with talents and abilities. And God has warmed your heart with love.

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Willimon, The Great Delegator, Pulpit Resources, July 9, 2006, pg. 10.

2. The second implication of today's Gospel lesson is that true orthodoxy – going back to following a pattern of the first century Church – implies that God provides for all the needs of those engaged in his ministry.

*<sup>8</sup>He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup>but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup>He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup>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."*

God provides the sustenance, the clothing, even the strength to not become weary. Those who grow dependent upon the world, grow dependent upon crafty ingenuity, or become dependent upon accumulated resources begin to place their trust in that which is other than God. This is called idolatry.

I've noticed in my own life and experience that the process of working in ministry outside of the parish has allowed me to be less dependent upon the church, and to place more and more of my absolute trust in God. Instead of just preaching utter dependence upon God, I'm more able to live it. If any of my colleagues would ask me about it, I would highly recommend "tent making ministry" (as the apostle Paul called it) as a faithful way to fulfill God's call for one's life.

Now, I know that all of us need to be appreciated, validated for the ministry to which we've been called. But Jesus very astutely recognizes the fact that the world is an unreliable source of this appreciation. Some will refuse to hear you. Some will hate and despise you. So be it. Being a minister of the Gospel recognizes the fact that the only validation we need is what God gives us. Anything else is gravy.

3. The third implication of today's Gospel lesson is that we are called to be servant ministers.

The master is Jesus Christ. We are his servants. It is that simple.

When we look to the life and ministry of Christ, we see that he modeled for us servant ministry – reaching out to serve the needs of the poor, disadvantaged, infirmed, aged, and children. He served the widow and orphaned, the disfigured and the demon possessed. In the service of his heavenly Father, Jesus became a fisher-of-men, calling others to become faithful disciples.

When tempted to take everything for himself – be it the glory of being crowned king, or given all the kingdoms of the world if he only worship the devil himself – Jesus opted to give it all away – power, status, wealth, even life itself. In an ultimate act of selflessness, Jesus surrenders his life for our sins.

When we serve the world in Christ's name, following his values and will, we are being his servants.

4. The final implication of today's lesson is that ministry is Spirit led and gifts based. In the absence of Jesus' physical presence, we have his Holy Spirit, given as a powerful gift to us, to be our guide, guard, and strength. It is the Spirit of Christ who breaths life into ministry, making it become more than simple good works, rather, making it become the fulfilled will of God.

One of many things that you people of Zion are really good at, as I've observed, is your attention to gifts based ministry. It was probably planted or nourished by pastor Anne – the gifts based workshop, starting with an assessment, and following with tools to put your gifts to work. This is the way healthy parishes operate.

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People's passion and gifts are coupled with the will and power of the Spirit to be the source of all ministry.

One would think this is obvious; but it's not. All too often, the church gets it backwards. Someone sees a job to be done, or comes up with a great idea, and everyone votes to support or reject it.

Dearly beloved, God's kingdom is not a democracy! God does not recognize the artificial barriers we put in place to prevent ministry from taking place, to withhold permission, or to keep something underfunded or unfunded. God doesn't play such games. And woe to those who do.

If it is God's will, the people with the gifts will be called forth to make it happen. All the resources will be provided. And it will happen – either with us, or in spite of us.

Ministry takes place according to God's design and in God's time. All too often, we are only afforded a brief glimpse of God's greater, more complete plan, or, sometimes, none at all. We lose confidence and faith that perhaps we are not doing the will of God or that we are not being faithful. But do not be tempted by such thoughts.

By our baptism we've been called and claimed. Rest assured that these hands – everybody hold up your hands! – these hands are God's hands. Rest assured that your minds and my mind are filled with God's thoughts. And rest assured that the heart you've been given is filled with the love of God.

Dearly beloved, consider yourselves ministers of the Gospel, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that go along with the role. But ministers you are, called and claimed just as I have been. Let it be known to all the world that this vineyard is God's vineyard. This harvest is God's harvest. And all of us, stewards of the vines, are God's servants, working in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

This, my beloved, is the Word of God, as it has come unto me, this day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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