

+ Mark 6:7-13 + Jesus Sends Out His Messengers + 8th Sunday after Pentecost + 22 July 2012 +

If your loved one is in great need or great danger or in great pain, who of us would hesitate to help them or try to rescue them or do everything we can to make them feel better? Yet when it comes to their great spiritual need that puts them in great spiritual danger, why do you and I so naturally hesitate to point them to their Savior? Is it a fear of rejection—that your friend might stop being your friend if you talk about Jesus? Is it a fear of failure—that your loved one might end up in hell if you say the “wrong thing”? How about a fear of God’s judgment if you don’t give a perfect explanation?

Deep inside you know why you hesitate when the Savior gives you an opportunity. Your sinful nature doesn’t want you to talk about Jesus. To do so would defy the very being of your sinful nature, and it fears what the Lord can do through you. So you make excuses, and you hesitate.

Unlike your sinful nature, Jesus doesn’t use fear. He uses love and power, which remove doubt and fear. He sends out ordinary people like you and me as his messengers to the world, but he doesn’t send you out like defenseless sheep to hungry wolves. No, with his loving instruction and powerful blessing, **JESUS SENDS OUT HIS MESSENGERS.**

“I’m not qualified to do that.” One of the biggest reasons we hesitate to point people to Jesus is this idea that we’re not qualified. What if they ask a question you can’t answer? You feel “unqualified”, even though the most highly trained pastor can feel just as “unqualified” at times. For that reason, **Jesus sends out his messengers with his loving instruction.**

Prior to our text, Jesus had visited a number of cities and large towns, but on this tour, his plan was to reach the small towns and villages dotting the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Time was growing short for Jesus to get his message out to the **“lost sheep of Israel”** (Matthew 10:6), so he planned to send out his own disciples to spread his good news. Still these ordinary men needed some training.

With his loving instruction, Jesus prepared his disciples for the work of Gospel ministry. He first taught them **to seek the lost.** After all, that was his purpose in coming to this earth. Like a shepherd in search of his lost sheep, Jesus had left the comforts of heaven to walk the dusty roads of this sinful world searching for those lost in sin and unbelief. He started with his disciples. Jesus had shared with them the good news of forgiveness for all their sins and of life through his own perfect life and upcoming innocent death. Then he sent them out to seek the lost in the villages of Galilee.

As Jesus sends you out as his messengers, he teaches you **to seek the lost.** Although we live 2000 years since Jesus walked the earth, Christ’s purpose hasn’t changed any. He still seeks the lost. As with the disciples, it all starts right here. By nature, you and I are completely dead in sin, hostile to God’s holy will, and deserving of his eternal punishment. By nature we were wandering into hell. In his mercy, the Lord rescued you through the hearing of the saving message of his perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection and through the saving waters of Holy Baptism.

Now by his grace, Jesus makes you his messenger seeking out those still lost in sin and unbelief. Every one of us has people in our lives who do not know Jesus or who think they need to earn God’s favor or who simply have rejected what God’s Word has to say. Often the Lord puts you and me into their lives to connect them to Christ their Savior. To them Jesus sends you in spite of the squawking objections of your sinful nature. Through you, Jesus seeks that loved one, that friend, that neighbor, that co-worker, that classmate who remains lost in unbelief and is headed for hell.

As you seek the lost, Jesus also teaches you **to trust his grace.** Jesus gave his disciples some unusual instructions that would take a lot of trust. **“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.”**

So they were supposed to go hungry, penniless, and in rags? That’s not what Jesus is saying. Rather Jesus teaches them to trust his grace. He didn’t want them to take anything extra for their journeys, because he would provide for them. They wouldn’t have to worry about lugging along extra food, because their meals would be provided in the villages they visited. Jesus wouldn’t just provide a roof over their heads, but housing that would be more than sufficient. This lesson in trust went against the grain of their sinful natures, but still the Lord provided just as he promised.

As Jesus sends you out, he also teaches you **to trust his grace**. Often you and I tend to worry we might lose something—status, friendship, money—if we share the Savior with a friend or co-worker or neighbor or relative. Sometimes that can even be a temptation for us as a congregation. Do we really want to spend time, effort, and money in outreach that could potentially end up being only a big waste of time, effort, and money?

In the face of such temptation, Jesus urges us to trust his grace. He doesn't leave you penniless, hungry, and in rags, but pours out grace upon grace. Consider this promise. **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’** (Jeremiah 29:11) If you worry about “losing something”, consider this promise. **“Do not fear, little flock, for the Lord has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”** (Luke 12:32) God's Word is loaded with such gracious promises, and he makes good on every one of them!

Even as the Lord teaches you to trust his grace, he teaches you **to proclaim his truth**. The primary task of the Lord's messenger is to proclaim the saving message of the Gospel, but sometimes he has to proclaim the stern message of God's holy Law. People reject that message, so Jesus instructed, **“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.”** This act of dusting off their feet was a symbolic gesture that God would judge those people for their rejection unless they repented.

As the Lord sends you out, he instructs you **to proclaim his truth**. That means you may have to condemn sin for what it is—ugly disobedience against God's holy Law. Unfortunately you may even have to proclaim that hard message to someone you love to warn them from their life of sin. It's not always easy proclaiming God's truth, but it's always necessary. You do no good for your loved ones if you remain silent about their sin, but out of love for them and for God's truth, you speak God's Law when necessary.

Speaking that truth in love also means proclaiming the saving message of the Gospel. While the stern message of the Law crushes hearts, the healing message of the Gospel rebuilds them with the full and free forgiveness of Christ—the same forgiveness you received and still receive. What a joyous privilege to share the forgiveness of Jesus with someone you love. You become a blessing to your loved ones when you speak that full truth of God, but Jesus also sends you out **with his powerful blessing**.

See that blessing in the **weakness of God's messengers**. Simple, ordinary men took the greatest message in the world to the ends of the earth. Jesus sent them not with flashy appearances, eloquent words, and shrewd arguments, but in weakness. There was a reason for that. Through the seeming weakness of his messengers, God made his power shine brightly. They became God's instruments sharing his love for every single soul.

The same holds true for you and me today. In faithful service to your Lord, you use your best gifts and talents and treasures, but the Savior still sends you out in weakness. Through that weakness, Christ turns the world upside down. Souls whom you'd never expect hear about their Savior. Hearts and lives change forever, not because of your flashy appearance or eloquent words or shrewd arguments, but because the gracious power of Christ shines brightly even through your faltering words and hesitant invitations.

That power shines brightest through the seemingly weak Word of God. The Lord once promised, **“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”** (Isaiah 55:10-11) Through weakness, the Lord displays his power through the spreading of the Word of God. It brings life to the spiritually dead, sight to the spiritually blind, and transforms enemies of God into his beloved children. What is truly powerful about the Word, though, is its simplicity contained in a simple passage like **“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:23) With such simplicity, God changes hearts forever through his almighty Word in spite of our weakness.

Brothers and sisters, remember that you are messengers sent out with the Savior's loving instruction and with his powerful blessing. You have nothing to fear because he will never leave you nor forsake you, and he will surely bless your work. So let's go. We've got work to do! Amen.