

**July 8, 2018**  
**7th Sunday after Pentecost – Mark 6:1-13**  
***“Notes from the Disciple’s Field Survival Guide”***  
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As we continue reading through Mark this year, there are a few things about this gospel it will be helpful to keep in mind. Mark’s writing is spare and lean; it is the shortest of the four gospels. Mark’s Jesus speaks early and often about what lies ahead for him - betrayal, death and resurrection. Mark’s is perhaps the most demanding of the gospels, with repeated mention of the call to be a servant and the need to pick up our cross and die to self to follow Jesus.

Today’s gospel passage offers us two excellent case studies in Mark’s boot camp for discipleship. We could even call this passage “The Disciple’s Field Survival Guide”. Reflection on this passage can help us answer the question – “What does Jesus’ way of love and faithfulness to God’s kingdom look like lived out?”

In the first case study story, Jesus has led the disciples back to Nazareth, his hometown. He has been teaching them about the kingdom of God in parables of the sower and the mustard seed. He has demonstrated what that kingdom looks like in his work of casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead. Word of Jesus’ growing reputation as teacher and healer has gotten back to Nazareth. The local folks eagerly await this moment to show their “hometown pride”. There’s excitement in the air with their celebrity native son coming back to his roots, the place where it all began. All grown up now, their celebrity son will certainly give thanks for his “homeys”, the ones who helped him get a good start in life. Surely he will offer his gratitude and praise for all they’ve taught, which has helped him to become what looks and sounds like a “religious” success story. I’ll bet those hometown Nazareth folks – that is, Jesus’ closest friends and relatives, his dearest “go to” people – are expecting to hear Jesus say what an honor it is to be back there with them, how good and right it feels to have come home. Home to the place where he learned the Jewish faith, was nurtured by them in community life, celebrated his Bar mitzvah. It looks like God has been blessing Jesus abundantly, if all they are hearing about him is true.

We expect a hearty, warm welcome home. A ticker tape parade, glasses raised all around to toast Jesus, Nazareth’s native son returned. Those who hear him speak in the synagogue that morning are astounded, amazed, astonished. Another meaning of the Greek word translated here as “astounded” is “panicked”. They were thrown into a panic by what he taught.

“We had no idea he was this good!” “How did he get so wise all of a sudden?” “Where did he get this ability?”

And in the next breath they are cutting him down to size: “He’s just a carpenter – Mary’s boy. We’ve known him since he was a kid. We know his family, his brothers James, Joses, Judas and Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?”

*“They took offense at him”*. Were scandalized by him. Or as *The Message* paraphrases it - “They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further.”

This is not the homecoming anyone expected! Sadly, sometimes it’s among those nearest and dearest to us that it’s the hardest for the good news of Jesus to be heard and accepted. It’s so easy to restrict or dismiss what we think God is capable of doing. We just cannot imagine it being any different, cannot entertain any truth beyond what we already know.

By our standards, Jesus’ reception in Nazareth would not qualify as a success. Most of us would put it on the failure side of the ledger. *“Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.”* The people who know and love him best cannot believe that he has been empowered by God to do the things he is doing. It is a new and unsettling idea that they cannot wrap their minds around. They resist this possibility which they cannot explain.

Mark doesn’t tell us what Jesus taught in the synagogue that day. We don’t know the content of Jesus’ message which got them so unnerved and threw them into a panic. Whatever it was, we can be certain it was truth spoken in love. The hometown crowd may have been nostalgic, expecting warm and fuzzy, comforting words from Jesus. What they heard may have sounded to them like sharp, bracing, convicting, and challenging words. To hear the truth spoken aloud does not always feel good, especially when it is someone else’s truth we are hearing for the first time. But truth spoken aloud is liberating and life-giving. The Nazareth folk probably weren’t looking for or expecting liberation and new life. Sometimes we aren’t looking for liberation and new life, either, and we resist or block the power of God to do something new.

The first lesson in the discipleship field survival guide is this: Speak the truth in love. Don’t expect to be understood or shown respect. And remember the 3 R’s: *Resilient* disciples *Rebound* from *Rejection*. Jesus doesn’t hang around trying to convince the hometown crowd how he has been able to teach and heal with authority. He doesn’t catalog every instance of healing, every case where he has sent demons packing. Jesus’ response that prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown does not seem angry. Perhaps discouraged and sad is closer to what Jesus was feeling. Sometimes people are not ready for truth, for a call to change, even if it is change that promises to bring liberation and new life. Jesus does what he can and moves on. There are other important lessons to share with his disciples from the field survival manual. .

In the second case study story, the time has come for the disciples to get real life, hands-on practice doing the acts of ministry they have been seeing and hearing and learning about from Jesus. It’s their turn now. Jesus sends them out in pairs, and gives them authority, the same authority he has been given by God, to cast out unclean spirits. The second lesson from the field survival guide is this: Travel light – very light.

Carry no bread, no bag, no money, no second tunic. And remember the message – who you are, what you believe, what you’ve learned about what is most important in life – relationship with God and neighbor. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. *Travel light and remember the essentials.* You are not going to have room or energy for dragging along that extra baggage of fear, regret, resentment, anger, judgment or shame. Bring the peace of God’s kingdom wherever you go, and remain in that place as long as you are welcome.

The third lesson in the discipleship field survival guide is linked directly to the second lesson. Without bread, bag, money or extra coat, you will have to be humble. Be a kind, respectful, and grateful guest who relies on the hospitality of strangers. Now what is this all about? It’s one thing to invite guests onto our home turf, into the place where we are in charge. Entertaining guests can be enjoyable, renewing, and life-giving. But going outside the boundaries of our home, our church, our usual close group of like-minded friends? Moving from being “insiders” to step willingly outside what we have known and grown accustomed to? This is not easy, comfortable, appealing, or safe, which is why Jesus wisely sends the disciples out in pairs so they can give each other support. The discipleship way, this following Jesus can be hard and scary and lonely.

This lesson begins to set the stage for how the disciples will manifest the reality of God’s kingdom, just like Jesus has been doing. They will depend on God’s providence and the kindness of strangers. They will cross boundaries. One day with them Jesus is on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee. The next day he crosses over to the Gentile side, healing and bringing good news to both Jews and Gentiles. In order to become guests who rely on the hospitality of others, the disciples will have to begin to cross cultural, religious, purity, and ethnic boundaries.

Dependent on another’s hospitality, one of the main questions to be asked is, “What does love call for in this situation?” When we are not in charge, not in control, we can choose each moment whether we will listen to the voice of love or the voice of fear, which by the way, is not from God. In last week’s gospel we talked about how healing comes to us when we let ourselves be vulnerable. Here again, in the act of depending on a stranger’s hospitality, we are invited to exercise the courage to let down our guardedness and be vulnerable – by taking a risk, facing uncertainty, and being emotionally exposed. Yes, there is possible danger. Yes we could get hurt. Yes we could be ignored. And we also could make a new friend. We could learn something about another person, another place we didn’t know before. We could learn something about ourselves and how others see us. We could learn that as people we are more similar than different from each other. We might begin to see that we have gifts to offer each other. And I’ll let you in on a little secret: this willingness to depend on the hospitality of others is the key to renewed vitality and robust life as a community of 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples.

It may happen that we will not be received graciously and hospitably when we find ourselves in new territory. The hospitality of our host might wear thin. If so, then it’s time to move on. Pray for peace in that place, and move on. We are not responsible

for the growth of the seeds of good news we sow in Christ's name. Our job is to faithfully share the love we have freely been given without expecting anything in return, without expecting a specific result.

The fourth and final lesson from the field survival guide has to do with our expectations. There are so many places and situations, so many people in this world who hunger for the healing, liberating, and life-giving power of God's love. The disciples must have felt mightily encouraged by their ministry "success" when they came back together to share their stories. They *were* able to call others to repentance. They had learned ways to encourage hearers to turn around and go in a different direction. Jesus gave them authority, so they *were* able to cast out demons and heal those who were sick.

There is no need to wring our hands worrying about how things will turn out when we live the good news of God's love in what we do and say. We can confidently expect to see healing happen and unclean spirits cast out when we dare to live boldly in Jesus' love, bearing his spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the ministry to which we are all called. No matter our age or stage in life, God's love needs to flow to us and through us. This is what our baptism is all about. We have the Spirit of the living Christ inside us. We have each other. We have Scripture, prayer, and the Sacraments – especially the Eucharist.

There is a portion near the end of Eucharistic Prayer C that grabs my heart every time we pray it. Listen for this today near the end of the Eucharistic Prayer: "Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. *Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.* Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name."

Instruction. Strength. Renewal. The reminder that we are one body, one spirit in Christ, charged with sharing good news out there in the trenches of the world. This is our survival gear as disciples of Jesus, walking his way of love.

In today's bulletin you will find an insert with a list of discipleship questions that pertain to the gospel reading and this sermon. I invite and encourage you this week to re-read the gospel passage and then ponder and pray over the list of discipleship questions. I am available to anyone who wants to have further conversation. Hopefully you will talk to at least one other person about something you've heard or learned or wonder about. Maybe you'd like to talk with another member of the congregation. We are gifts to each other. Take advantage of opportunities to both speak and listen to the experiences of each other on this journey with Jesus.

### **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

Is there something in me that is blocking God's transformative power? If so, can I, and am I willing to name it, and invite God to help me be open to all God wants to do for me, in me, and through me?

Do I believe that I am sent with Jesus' power and authority to continue the work of Jesus – to heal and to confront the unclean spirits that plague our society and the world? If not, why not? How willing am I to pray about this and ask God for the desire to claim the authority I was given at my baptism?

In my specific form of ministry – parenting, grand-parenting, care giving, mentoring, in a specific ministry at Trinity – property care, vestry, altar guild, prayer chain member, teacher, helper with Thursday morning breakfast – upon what do I depend (am I depending) as I carry out this ministry to which I have been called?

How am I doing at taking the good news on the road daily - shopping, doctor/dentist visits, doing household chores, interacting with family/neighbors/friends, encountering complete strangers? If it is difficult for me to share the love of God, can I (and will I) ask the Holy Spirit to help me identify what makes it difficult to be bold in naming and claiming the importance of my living relationship with God? Will I pray for the Spirit's help to be a daring, courageous witness to the good news?