

Mark 6:1-6 (The Message)

He left there and returned to his hometown. His disciples came along. On the Sabbath, he gave a lecture in the meeting place. He made a real hit, impressing everyone. "We had no idea he was this good!" they said. "How did he get so wise all of a sudden, get such ability?"

But in the next breath they were cutting him down: "He's just a carpenter—Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers, James, Justus, Jude, and Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?" They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further.

Jesus told them, "A prophet has little honor in his hometown, among his relatives, on the streets he played in as a child." Jesus wasn't able to do much of anything there—he laid hands on a few sick people and healed them, that's all. He couldn't get over their stubbornness. He left and made a circuit of the other villages, teaching.

Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition. He sent them off with these instructions:

"Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment. No special appeals for funds. Keep it simple.

And no luxury inns. Get a modest place and be content there until you leave.

If you're not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Don't make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way."

Then they were on the road. They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different; right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits.

This is the Word of God and It Can Be Trusted

Thanks Be To God

During our Sunday morning look at the scriptures we have had more than one occasion to learn about my fondness of science fiction and fantasy books and film. Today, I want to tell you about another favorite of mine as it relates to the topic of being called and the importance of faith.

The Lord of the Rings, the book and movie of the 20th Century is a groundbreaking epic of good versus evil, extraordinary heroes, wondrous creatures and dark armies of terror. Generations of more than 50 million people around the globe, in 25 different languages have grown up with this epic history. The legend has inspired an entire genre of movies, fiction, and has influenced some of the greatest artists of our time. It has made dreamers out of children and adults alike, and was named the number one most popular book of the 20th Century.

The Lord of the Rings collectively tells the story of Frodo Baggins, a Hobbit who battles against the Dark Lord Sauron to save his world, Middle-earth, from the grip of evil. In the trilogy of films, The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers and The Return of the King, Frodo and his Fellowship of friends and allies embark on a desperate journey to rid the earth of the source of Sauron's greatest strength, the One Ring—a ring that has the power to enslave the inhabitants of Middle-earth. The trilogy

chronicles extraordinary adventures across the treacherous landscape of Middle-earth and reveals how the power of friendship, love and courage can hold the forces of darkness at bay.

Frodo the hobbit recognizes and carries out his "call" to destroy the evil "one ring" before its power is able to corrupt and destroy all of Middle Earth. His call involves a long and extremely dangerous journey, and the likelihood that Frodo will return alive is slim to none. In one scene, Frodo expresses to Gandalf the wizard his fear and his wish that the ring had never come to him. Gandalf responds with these words, "We cannot choose the time we live in. We can only choose what we do with the time we are given."

Today's scripture readings are about recognizing a call, but also recognizing the limitations that may distract, detour or even (if we given into them) prevent us from carrying out that call. Not only that, they tell the story of how the Lord has placed an absolutely amazing amount of trust in us! We know that the

trust of God in us is great because we have been sent into a difficult world. Just as Frodo's journey placed him in a tough place to be - so the world you and I must enter as representatives of God's Kingdom is also a tough place. "We cannot choose the time we live in. We can only choose what we do with the time we are given."

So as we look at the story of Jesus sending out the disciples in the gospel of Mark this morning, there are three barriers they encounter during their mission. We can learn from their experience because we will encounter the very same barriers if we take seriously the commission of Jesus Christ to "*...go into all the world.*" Two of the barriers are external - things we will face in the world. The third barrier is an internal one - something we will face within ourselves.

Before we continue this morning, let's take a moment to seek God and ask that He prepare us for this lesson today. Let us pray.

Dear God of Heaven:

Teach us this day to recognize our call, but more importantly help us to be aware of our limitations; those things that will distract from carrying out our call, so that we may be well equipped to deal with them and to overcome them for your Glory. Open our minds that we may learn, our hearts that we may feel, our eyes that we may see and our ears that we may hear you in this place today. All the saints in heaven and on earth join in giving all glory, honor and praise to you, both now and forevermore.

Amen!

First we recognize that there often exists a barrier of unbelief. When Jesus went to do ministry in his home town of Nazareth, he encountered an unbelief that far exceeded any that he and the twelve had seen. Thus resulting in the well known quote, "A prophet has little honor in his hometown, among his relatives, [and] on the streets he played in as a child." [6:4]

One of the barriers we will face when we enter our world as people who have been called is likewise the unbelief of the world. Though Jesus, being God, knew that he would encounter such

unbelief, he still finds amazement in the unbelief of the people in his hometown. Many of us have been raised in the Christian tradition. Many of us have been hurt by it, others have found solace and comfort in its teachings. Either way, to say that we *believe* in Jesus Christ is expected, it "*goes with the territory,*" so *to speak*. But, in an increasingly unchurched culture, acquaintance with Christ is generally nominal at best. Our own brothers and sisters in the GLBT community have found themselves experiencing the barrier of unbelief; a road block, a misdirected detour. They fail to find comfort in the promise of God's Word because of the world's unbelief that the GLBT community can be loved, called and sent by God.

And there's more... when we take the essential biblical meaning of *believing* in Christ, it means much more than simply subscribing to the idea that Jesus is somehow the Son of God. It is not a passive concept, but an active one. To believe in Christ means to *place our trust* in Christ. It includes the idea of a commitment to be a *follower* of Christ.

Consider this. Unbelief in the biblical sense seems to have impacted, not just our culture, but our churches as well. Young people today know a lot about the social justice issues of Christianity; whether they are pro choice or pro abortion, supportive of stem cell research or against it, or understanding of gay marriage or in clear support against it; many today mask their own biases and prejudices behind out of context scripture with little to no knowledge of biblical text.

I remember during one of my first years of teaching, I was discussing with geometry class symbols found in *sacred* geometry. Somehow the adoption of pagan symbols into Christianity came into the discussion and one of my students expressed that he was clear on what I meant. One example I offered was this, "Well, Billy, it is like the tradition that Jesus was born on December 25th. We don't really know exactly what day He was born on, so the Church adopted December 25th, a pagan holiday that celebrated the birth of the sun god Sol as the day we

would celebrate the birth of Christ." Needless to say, I had inadvertently crushed his belief system.

The barrier of unbelief is one we will encounter when we take seriously the fact that the Lord wants to *send* us to bring the good news to our world. Not the good news of December 25th, bracelets engraved with WWJD (what would Jesus do) or the imagery of crosses our sanctuaries and *Christian* apparel, but rather the good news of Christ Birth, His life, His ministry, His death and finally His resurrection.

Secondly we recognize that we may encounter the barrier of resistance. There is more than unbelief in our world. We will also encounter resistance to the whole message of Christ. Jesus' hometown folk not only did not believe, "*...they took offense at him.*"

It is as though there has been a progression in the Western world particularly with respect to the Christian faith. We've moved from a culture that was friendly to Christianity, to one that

is neutral to Christianity, to a time when much of the culture is *unfriendly* to Christianity; especially the Christianity that expresses themselves as open and affirming. Jesus warned his followers from the very beginning that the world would give his followers the same treatment he had received.

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But I have chosen you out of the world, so you don't belong to it. That is why the world hates you.²⁰ Remember what I told you: A servant is not greater than his master. If people did wrong to me, they will do wrong to you, too. And if they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours, too. (John 15:18-20)

Have you ever noticed that it is okay to refer to God in our society or even to Buddha or Mohammed - but often, people take offence if the name of Jesus is mentioned? It may be that some of this has been because some who present themselves as followers of Jesus have been particularly obnoxious or hurtful.

Gandhi once said, "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ." The fact remains, however, that *taking offense* at the name of Jesus is not uncommon. If you take seriously the fact that you are one of the *called ones* of Christ, you are sure to encounter resistance.

Lastly, there is the barrier of temporality. There is an old gospel song that includes the lines:

*This world is not my home, I'm just passing through,
My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue,
The angels beckon me, from heaven's open door,
I cannot feel at home in this world anymore."*

Jesus warned his disciples, "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" [Matt. 8:20] Now he sends them out without the support of the world. They are to depend solely upon their trust in him and on the provision of those who receive their message and ministry.

We are limited, temporal beings and the most important things in life are not the fading treasures of this world, but the *forever* treasures of spiritual things. When we become the *called ones* of Christ, we turn away from the world's standards of success and well being to the standards of Jesus Christ. We must, in the words of the great German Theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, consider *The Cost of Discipleship*.

There are also three things that we have been given that empower our "being called." These are the things that will overcome the barriers. We dare not enter this dangerous world on our own apart from the empowering gifts of Christ.

1. We have the authority of Christ

The heart of Jesus' commission to his followers was that *he* called them, *he* sent them and most of all - *he* gave them authority over the barriers they would face. The true sense of the word authority used here is "power." Recall Jesus' words to the twelve, "Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for

this. You are the equipment. No special appeals for funds. Keep it simple." Though they went without the provisions of the world, they were given the power of Christ.

2. We have the community of Christ

Here's something absolutely essential to the well being of those who are called by Christ. Jesus did not send his disciples out alone. They went in pairs. Remember his words, *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*

[Matt. 18:20]

We are not only given the power of Christ, we are given the community of Christ. New Day Worship Center is a community of faith; your community of faith. Together we have had opportunity to pray, talk and in some cases cry with one another. More importantly, together we have sought God together and we have found comfort in His love and Will. It is when we choose not to take advantage of this community and the community of

Christ that we get into trouble by trying to maintain a healthy spirituality on our own.

There is a story of a pastor from many decades ago who went to visit a man who had not been in church for a long time. The man greeted his pastor with the words, *"I suppose you've come to give me a scolding about being away from church."* The pastor said, *"No, I've just come to talk."*

They went inside and sat in front of the fireplace as they talked baseball and the weather and how the harvest looked good for this year. As they talked, the pastor took the poker from beside the fireplace and pulled one glowing ember away from the fire and continued talking.

As they talked, the ember which had been aflame, then aglow finally turned dark while the rest of the fire continued to burn and glow. Then the pastor took his leave and went home.

The man was in church the following Sunday.

Without community we, like the lone ember, will lose our glow.

3. We have the fruit of our ministry

Recall the words of Christ that we heard earlier this year, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.* (John 15)

Those who are called and empowered by Christ will find themselves casting out demons and bringing health and wholeness where there is sickness. The demons that plague our world with oppression, hatred, bondage and prejudice will give way when confronted by Christ in the person of his disciples. Disease and brokenness will give way to healing when ministered to by those who are the *called* by God.

We have learned that God is in control and that we must rely on God's time. Also know this; God never gives up on us. The disciples were not perfect, but they were faithful. We are not perfect, but if we are faithful to seek God's call and to do all we can to honor it, then God is faithful to prepare a path for us; to

keep it pruned and to guide us in the way He would have us to go.

New Day Worship Center is currently a small community of faith. Jesus had twelve, we have fifteen to twenty. There are individuals here today who are beginning to find themselves in a place they may have never thought they would be; that is, a part of the Kingdom of God. I have been incredibly blessed by many of you. I have felt your prayers, seen your tears and heard your desire to do more for this community of faith, but more importantly to do more for our God and the work of His Kingdom in this community.

During our sermon hymn and musical interlude today, pray that God will make His Will for you clear and ask Him for the strength and power to go where He leads you. Amen!