

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 15, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Mark 6:7-13 Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

8 These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. **9** Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. **10** Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. **11** And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

12 They went out and preached that people should repent. **13** They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

“Travel Light with Jesus”

When you travel, how you pack depends on where you are going and what you are doing. If you are going to stay with family for a few days, you don't need to bring much. They will probably have a bed or at least a couch for you to stay on. Food will be provided or meal responsibilities will be shared. If, however, you are traveling to an isolated camping spot to escape from contact with other human beings, your travel arrangements will be quite different. You might need clothes for warm weather and cold weather, wet weather and dry weather. You will need to bring all the food you need and all the equipment necessary to cook, eat, and clean up for every meal. In general, we want to make sure we bring every essential for our travels without bringing along extra baggage that will just get in the way and cause problems.

After graduating from college I went to Mexico to study. While we were there, we took a two day trip up into the mountains to a remote hot spring called Hieve el Agua. I didn't know exactly what to expect, so it was hard to figure out how to pack. It was just a two day trip where we would visit hot springs in a beautiful, remote mountain setting. So I just packed a small backpack with basic essentials and an extra bottle of water. Pastor Phil Hirsch was then a teacher at Martin Luther College and now is our District President. For that trip into the mountains, Pastor Hirsch brought along a plastic grocery store bag containing one swim suit and a couple of bananas. He has forever redefined for me what it means to pack light.

In Mark chapter six, Jesus sends out his disciples on an important mission. He commissions them by his authority. He instructs them how to carry out his work. He provides guidance and direction. He gifts them with his power to accomplish his mission. But those instructions aren't just for those 12 gentlemen those 2,000 years ago. Jesus commissions all of his disciples to carry out his work. He commissions and equips and sets us loose. Jesus wants us to travel light with him.

It would be nice to have a little more background information about this episode in Jesus' ministry. But overall Jesus is basically a rockstar. The apostles must feel special that they get such close access to him and feel privilege to be given special work to do in his name. And

yet, they are still somewhat confused about who Jesus is and what he came to do. Every few days or every few hours they go from being fired up for Jesus to being completely baffled by his approach. But it must have been quite an honor to even be considered for this important work: **“Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.”** (Mark 6:7) They are given a special commission to serve Jesus. They share in his work. They partner with him as they go with his authority and his power.

Bible scholars note that Mark doesn't give this account of the good news of Jesus in the chronological way we would expect. But that doesn't mean there isn't any organization, no flow of thought as he progresses from chapter to chapter. Between this account of Jesus commissioning disciples and the one we will look at next week comes a very sobering, even distressing account. John the Baptist gets beheaded in the verses following after these. That reality of a faithful gospel servant losing his life because he dared to share God's message just helps make the truth about participating in the mission of Jesus more real. There is danger participating in the mission of proclaiming God's message and participating in the reign of God's kingdom.

That sobering reality hits home when we realize the message Jesus gave his disciples to share: **“They went out and preached that people should repent.”** (Mark 6:12) Telling people about wrong choices, wrong actions, wrong way of life is the last thing we want for ourselves. Up until the 20th century, traditional cultures always believed that too high a view of yourself was the root cause of all the evil in the world.¹ Our belief today — and it is deeply rooted in everything — is that people misbehave for lack of self-esteem and because they have too low a view of themselves. A husband beats his wife, lack of self-esteem. A teenager steals a car, doesn't think enough of himself. One thing about the 'low self-esteem theory of misbehavior' is that you do not have to make any moral judgments in order to deal with society's problems. All you have to do is support people and build them up. In traditional cultures, the way you dealt with these problems was that you clamped down on people and convicted them and called them bad!

That's when we take a step back, look at our travel plans, and start packing. We load up all the baggage of what we know people will think if we tell them to repent. We have no right to tell anyone how to live. We're no better than they are. Our way of looking at the world isn't really that different than theirs. Then we add to that all the gear of what we've already done for Jesus. I already do plenty for God. Other people really need to step up and show some dedication. I already have all I can handle. God has put so much on my plate. I've got work and family and helping clean up plenty of messes and living out my faith in so many other areas, I'm just tapped out.

There is a reason why Jesus told the Twelve Apostles not to take along anything more than they needed. And it wasn't just because they might become easy targets for robbers.

¹ Timothy Keller. *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, p. 9.

A little boy was excited to hear that circus was coming to town. The only problem was that it cost \$20 and he only had three dollars tucked into his top drawer left over after his last birthday. Realizing how much it meant to him, his parents agreed to pay him for extra chores he did around the house. A quarter for emptying the trash. Fifty cents for emptying the dishwasher. A dime for helping fold laundry. He finally collected just enough for the circus and just before it came to town. The day the circus as supposed to start, they held a parade through the town. The little boy got as close as he could while he watched the people and animals on their way to the big top. When he saw one of the last clowns, he rushed put to put his \$20 bill in its hand. When his father realized that his son saw the parade but not the circus itself, he said to him, "But, son, you missed the main event." It may be too easy to read the text from Mark 6 and get caught up in thinking, "I could never do that—just go off and take nothing with me and rely on other people like Jesus asked the disciples to do." But if that's all we get out of this text, then we've missed the main event. The focus is actually on the Lord—and on his care and providing for us as we journey through life carrying out his mission.

Jesus is doing some training for disciples then and now when he gives these instruction in Mark chapter 6. There is no need for extra baggage or equipment, because Jesus gives everything disciples need to carry out his mission. There is no need to fret and fuss over accommodations or personal comfort, because Jesus promises his generous help to take care of us. He is working to overcome this natural tendency inside every human heart that feels the need to take care of ourselves. Jesus wants us to unpack all of that. Instead, he wants to lighten our load by giving us his authority and power to accompany our mission.

That brings us back to the message of repentance. The message that is so intimidating to share is the exact message that is so necessary for all people. Trying to boost our self-esteem by trying to live up to our own standards or someone else's is a trap.² Counselors will often tell you the only person's opinion that really matters is yours, what you think about yourself. But then you are responsible for living up to your own standards. You have to live controlled by your own ego. You spend your energy building your identity around something other than God's identity given to you. You will always be busy. Always be competitive comparing yourself to others. You will always be fragile, susceptible to painful realities about yourself.

Repentance isn't advice or rules or keys for successful living. Repentance in the Bible has different meanings, but none of those things. Repentance can have a wider meaning, as in change your beliefs and trust in Jesus. It has a narrower meaning, as in change your behavior and your way of thinking. Whichever one it is, repentance requires a complete change of attitude. So the message the world needs is the exact same message we need to take to heart. Jesus wants to break through our default way of looking at ourselves and what we assume to be true. One influential Lutheran theologian gives us this important reminder: "But faith is not a mere opinion or empty profession; it is a living and efficacious apprehension of Christ as He is set forth in the Gospel. It is a most hearty conviction of

² Keller, p. 28.

God's grace to us, a confident tranquility of heart, and an undisturbed peace of conscience relying upon the merit of Christ."³ Repentance leads to this peace.

Last year we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It began on October 31, 1517 when Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses. The very first of those statements posted to spark a public debate says: "When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He meant that the whole life of the Christian should be one of repentance." Repentance is actually quite liberating. It means looking to Jesus for his not-guilty verdict. That removes the load of being trapped by your own ego. That takes off your shoulders the need to boost yourself at the expense of other, to compare and compete, to be better than others or even be the person you want to be. Repentance lifts all of that from you and gives you the perfect performance of Jesus as your own. Repentance opens our ears to hear Jesus' invitation: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** (Matthew 11:28-30)

There are movements going on right now where people are trying to simplify their lives. Especially younger generations are putting less importance in buying a big house and owning expensive vehicles. Some have chosen to backpack around the world with only the bare essentials on their backs. Some have converted vans or buses or ambulances into a home on wheels. There are even luxury tiny homes you can buy and move to your favorite location. One blogger described the benefit of giving it all up to backpack around the world. She said it enabled her to learn more about herself. And that's still the trap. Repentance and faith allow us to not worry about ourselves and live in the security of who we are in Christ. Instead of being overwhelmed by all the reactions and responses we might get, we are driven by the message the world needs to hear. Carrying out the commission Jesus gives for the joy of being Jesus' servant rather than how many points it will earn us. Serving people for the pleasure of what difference it can make in their lives rather than what they will think of us.

He lifts us up with his power and his authority. He gives us a new perspective to serve him faithfully with the gifts he has given us. He calls us to travel light as we trust in him. Travel light commissioned by Jesus' authority, accompanied by his power to carry out his mission. Amen.

+ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and work. +

³ Johann Gerhard. Sacred Meditations, p. 68.